

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF NILS



Selma Lagerlöf

THE C.I.C. SERIES

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THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF NILS

by Selma Lagerlöf

With illustrations in full colour and drawings in the text by
HANS BAUMHAUER

This is the continuation of the Swedish classic for children, *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*.

We left Nils Holgersson, the boy who was turned into an elf because of his naughtiness, on the back of the big white gander flying with the wild geese, and now go back to the time twelve years before Nils set out on his travels. We are told the story of Grayskin the elk, and of Helpless the grass-snake, before we meet Nils again with old Akka, the wise leader of the wild geese, who is with her flock on the shores of a forest lake.

Again we fly with Nils and his flock over the lakes, hills, ice and snow, forests, and moors of Sweden, and read of the many adventures that befall them all, until at last Nils returns to his home, regains his human form, and sadly watches his wild friends, whose language he can no longer understand, fly away. But he is a wiser boy than he was, and animals and birds can now trust him to be kind to them.

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THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF NILS

THE CHILDREN'S ILLUSTRATED CLASSICS



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‘MY OLD HORSE, MY OLD HORSE!’ HE SAID

THE
FURTHER ADVENTURES
OF
NILS



BY SELMA LAGERLÖF

Illustrated by
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SELMA LAGERLÖF was born in 1858 in Värmland, one of the most beautiful provinces of Middle Sweden. She died in 1940.

While still a child she was fascinated by folk stories, and dreamed from an early age of becoming a writer. She trained to be a teacher, and after some years' teaching experience she won a prize for her first novel, the famous 'Gösta Berlings Saga,' which launched her on her literary career.

In 1909 she was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, and so was able to afford to buy back her old home, Mårbacka, which she had longed to do for many years. And here she lived, though she travelled much abroad, until she died.

'The Wonderful Adventures of Nils' and 'The Further Adventures of Nils' were published in 1906-7, written specially for Swedish children; both volumes have been translated into most of the languages of the world.

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PART ONE

THE STORY OF KARR AND GRAYSKIN

KARR

ABOUT twelve years before Nils Holgersson started on his travels with the wild geese there was a foundry owner at Kolmården¹ who wanted to get rid of one of his dogs. He sent for his gamekeeper and told him that it was impossible to keep the dog because he could not

¹ A large forest in the middle of Sweden.

be broken of the habit of chasing all the sheep and fowl he set eyes on, and his owner asked the man to take it into the forest and shoot it.

The gamekeeper slipped the leash on the dog to lead him to a spot in the forest where all the very old dogs from the manor were shot and buried. He was not a cruel man, but he was very glad to shoot that dog, for he knew that sheep and chickens were not the only creatures he hunted. Times without number he had gone into the forest and helped himself to a hare or a grouse chick.

The dog was a little black-and-tan terrier. His name was Karr, and he was so wise he understood all that was said.

As the gamekeeper was leading him through the thickets Karr knew only too well what was in store for him. But this no one could have guessed by his behaviour, for he neither hung his head nor dragged his tail, but seemed as unconcerned as ever.

It was because they were in the forest that the dog was so careful not to appear the least bit anxious.

There were great stretches of woodland on every side of the old foundry, and this forest was famed both among animals and human beings because for many, many years the owners had been so careful of it that they had begrudged themselves even the trees needed for firewood. Nor had they had the heart to thin or train them. The trees had been allowed to grow as they pleased. Naturally a forest thus protected was a beloved refuge for wild animals, which were to be found there in great numbers. Among themselves they called it Free Forest, and regarded it as the best retreat in the whole country.

As the dog was being led through the woods he thought

of what a terror he had been to all the small animals and birds that lived there.

‘Now, Karr, wouldn’t they be happy in their lairs if they only knew what was awaiting you?’ he thought, but at the same time he wagged his tail and barked cheerfully, so that no one should think that he was worried or depressed.

‘What fun would there have been in living had I not hunted occasionally?’ he reasoned. ‘Let him who will regret; it’s not going to be Karr!’

But the instant the dog said this a singular change came over him. He stretched out his neck as though he wanted to howl. He no longer trotted alongside the gamekeeper but walked behind him. It was plain that he had begun to think of something unpleasant.

It was early summer; the elk cows had just given birth to their young, and, the night before, the dog had succeeded in parting from its mother an elk calf not more than five days old, and had driven it down into the marsh. There he had chased it back and forth over the tufts of grass, not with the idea of capturing it but merely for the sport of seeing how he could scare it. The elk cow knew that the marsh was bottomless so soon after the thaw, and that it could not as yet hold up so large an animal as herself, so she stood on firm ground for as long as she could watching. But when Karr kept chasing the calf farther and farther away she rushed out on the marsh, drove the dog off, took the calf with her, and turned back toward solid land. Elk are more skilled than other animals in crossing dangerous, marshy ground, and it seemed as if she would reach safety; but when she was almost there a tuft which she had stepped upon sank into the mire and she went down with it. She tried to rise, but could get no secure foothold, so

she sank and sank. Karr stood and looked on, not daring to move. When he saw that the elk could not save herself he ran away as fast as he could, for he had begun to think of the beating he would get if it were discovered that he had brought a mother elk to grief. He was so terrified that he dared not pause for breath until he reached home.

It was this that the dog recalled; and it troubled him in a way very different from the recollection of all his other misdeeds. This was doubtless because he had not really meant to kill either the elk cow or her calf, but had deprived them of life without wishing to do so.

‘But maybe they are alive yet!’ thought the dog. ‘They were not dead when I ran away; perhaps they saved themselves.’

He was seized with an irresistible longing to know for a certainty while yet there was time for him to find out. He noticed that the gamekeeper did not have a firm hold on the leash; so he made a sudden spring, broke loose, and dashed through the woods down to the marsh with such speed that he was out of sight before the gamekeeper had time to level his gun.

There was nothing for the gamekeeper to do but to rush after him. When he got to the marsh he found the dog standing upon a knoll, howling with all his might.

The man thought he had better find out the meaning of this, so he dropped his gun and crawled out over the marsh on hands and knees. He had not gone far when he saw an elk cow lying dead in the quagmire. Close beside her lay a little calf. It was still alive, but so much exhausted that it could not move. Karr was standing beside the calf, now bending down and licking it, now howling shrilly for help.

The gamekeeper raised the calf and began to drag it

toward land. When the dog understood that the calf would be saved he was wild with joy. He jumped round and round the gamekeeper, licking his hands and barking with delight.

The man carried the baby elk home and shut it up in a calf stall in the cowshed. Then he got help to drag the mother elk from the marsh. Only after this had been done did he remember that he was to shoot Karr. He called the dog to him and again took him into the forest.

The gamekeeper walked straight on toward the dogs' burial place; but all the while he seemed to be thinking deeply. Suddenly he turned and walked toward the manor.

Karr had been trotting along quietly; but when the gamekeeper turned and started for home he became anxious. The man must have discovered that it was he that had caused the death of the elk, and now he was going back to the manor to be thrashed before he was shot. . . .

To be beaten was worse than all else. With that prospect Karr could no longer keep up his spirits, but hung his head. When he came to the manor he did not look up but pretended that he knew no one there.

The master was standing on the stairs leading to the hall when the gamekeeper came forward.

'Where on earth did that dog come from?' he exclaimed. 'Surely it can't be Karr? He must be dead long ago!'

Then the man began to tell his master all about the mother elk, while Karr made himself as small as he could, and crouched behind the gamekeeper's legs.

Much to his surprise the man had only praise for him. He said it was plain the dog knew that the elk was in distress and wished to save them.

‘You may do as you like, but I can’t shoot that dog !’ declared the gamekeeper.

Karr raised himself and pricked up his ears. He could hardly believe that he heard aright. Although he did not want to show how anxious he had been he couldn’t help whining a little. Could it be possible that his life was to be spared simply because he had felt uneasy about the elk?

The master thought that Karr had conducted himself well, but as he did not want the dog, he could not decide at once what should be done with him.

‘If you will take charge of him and answer for his good behaviour in the future he may as well live,’ he said finally.

This the gamekeeper was only too glad to do, and that was how Karr came to move to the gamekeeper’s lodge.

GRAYSKIN’S FLIGHT

From the day that Karr went to live with the gamekeeper he abandoned entirely his forbidden hunts in the forest. This was due not only to his having been thoroughly frightened but also to the fact that he did not wish to make the gamekeeper angry with him. Ever since his new master saved his life the dog loved him above everything else. He thought only of following him and watching over him. If he left the house Karr would run ahead to make sure that the way was clear, and if he sat at home Karr would lie before the door and keep a close watch on every one who came and went.

When all was quiet at the lodge, when no footsteps were heard on the road, and the gamekeeper was working in his garden, Karr would amuse himself playing with the baby elk.

At first the dog had shown no desire to have anything to do with the elk calf. But since he accompanied his master everywhere, he went with him to the cowshed. When he gave the elk calf its milk the dog would sit outside the stall and gaze at it. The gamekeeper called the calf Grayskin because he thought it did not deserve a prettier name, and Karr agreed with him on that point.

Every time the dog looked at it he thought that he had never seen anything so ugly and misshapen as the baby elk, with its long, shambly legs, which hung down from the body like loose stilts. The head was large, old, and wrinkled, and it always drooped to one side. The skin lay in tucks and folds, as if the animal had put on a coat that had not been made for him. Always doleful and discontented, curiously enough he jumped up every time Karr appeared as if glad to see him.

The elk calf became more wretched from day to day, did not grow, and at last he could not even get up when he saw Karr. Then the dog jumped up into the crib to greet him, and thereupon a light kindled in the eyes of the poor creature—as if a cherished longing were fulfilled.

After that Karr visited the elk calf every day and spent many hours with him, licking his coat, playing and romping with him, till he taught him a little of everything a forest animal should know.

It was remarkable that, from the time Karr began to visit the elk calf in his stall, the latter seemed more contented and began to grow. After he was fairly started, he grew so rapidly that in a couple of weeks the stall could no longer hold him, and he had to be moved into a pen.

When he had been in the pen two months his legs

were so long that he could step over the fence whenever he wished. Then the lord of the manor gave the game-keeper permission to put up a higher fence and to allow him more space. Here the elk lived for several years, and grew up into a strong and handsome animal. Karr kept him company as often as he could; but now it was no longer through pity, for a great friendship had sprung up between the two. The elk was always inclined to be melancholy, listless, and indifferent, but Karr knew how to make him playful and happy.

Grayskin had lived for five summers on the game-keeper's place, when his owner received a letter from a zoological garden abroad asking if the elk might be purchased.

The master was pleased with the proposal, the game-keeper was distressed, but had not the power to say no; so it was decided that the elk should be sold. Karr soon discovered what was in the air and ran over to the elk to have a chat with him. The dog was very much distressed at the thought of losing his friend, but the elk took the matter calmly, and seemed neither glad nor sorry.

'Are you going to let them send you away without offering resistance?' asked Karr.

'What good would it do to resist?' asked Grayskin. 'I should prefer to remain where I am, naturally, but if I've been sold I shall have to go, of course.'

Karr looked at Grayskin and measured him with his eyes. It was apparent that the elk was not yet full grown. He did not have the broad antlers, high hump, and long mane of the mature elk; but he certainly had strength enough to fight for his freedom.

'One can see that he has been in captivity all his life,' thought Karr, but said nothing.

Karr left and did not return to the enclosure till long past midnight. By that time he knew Grayskin would be awake and eating his breakfast.

'Of course you are doing right, Grayskin, in letting them take you away,' remarked Karr, who appeared now to be calm and satisfied. 'You will be a prisoner in a large park and will live in ease and comfort. It seems a pity, though, that you must leave here without having seen the forest. You know your ancestors have a saying that "the elk are one with the forest." But you haven't even been in a forest!'

Grayskin glanced up from the clover which he stood munching.

'Indeed, I should love to see the forest, but how am I to get over the fence?' he said with his usual apathy.

'Yes, I suppose that is difficult for one who has such short legs,' said Karr.

The elk glanced slyly at the dog, who jumped the fence many times a day—little as he was.

He walked over to the fence, and with one spring he was on the other side, without knowing how it happened.

Then Karr and Grayskin went into the forest. It was a beautiful moonlight night in late summer; but in among the trees it was dark, and the elk walked along slowly.

'Perhaps we had better turn back,' said Karr. 'You, who have never before tramped the wild forest, might easily break your legs.' Grayskin moved more rapidly and with more courage.

Karr conducted the elk to a part of the forest where the spruce grew so thickly that no wind could penetrate them.

'It is here that your kind are in the habit of seeking

shelter from cold and storm,' said Karr. 'Here they stand under the open skies all the winter. But you will fare much better where you are going, for you will stand in a shed, with a roof over your head, like an ox.'

Grayskin made no comment, but stood quietly and drank in the strong, piny air.

'Have you anything more to show me, or have I now seen the whole forest?' he asked.

Then Karr went with him to a big marsh and showed him tufts of reeds and quagmire.

'Over this marsh the elk take flight when they are in peril,' said Karr. 'I don't know how they manage it, but large and heavy as they are they can walk here without sinking. Of course you couldn't hold yourself up on such dangerous ground, but then there is no occasion for you to do so, for you will never be hounded by hunters.'

Grayskin made no retort, but with a leap he was out on the marsh, and happy when he felt how the tufts rocked under him. He dashed across the marsh, and came back again to Karr without having stepped into a mudhole.

'Have we seen the whole forest now?' he asked.

'No, not yet,' said Karr.

He next conducted the elk to the edge of the forest, where fine oaks, lindens, and aspens grew.

'Here your kind eat leaves and bark, which they consider the choicest of food; but you will probably get better fare abroad.'

Grayskin was astonished when he saw the enormous leafy trees spreading like a great canopy above him. He ate both oak leaves and aspen bark.

'These taste deliciously bitter and good!' he remarked.
'Better than clover!'

'Then wasn't it well that you should taste them once?' said the dog.

Thereupon he took the elk down to a little forest lake. The water was as smooth as a mirror, and reflected the shores, which were veiled in thin, light mists. When Grayskin saw the lake he stood entranced.

'What is this, Karr?' he asked.

It was the first time that he had seen a lake.

'It's a large body of water—a lake,' said Karr. 'Your people swim across it from shore to shore. One could hardly expect you to be familiar with this; but at least you should go in and take a swim!'

Karr himself plunged into the water for a swim. Grayskin stayed back on the shore for some little time but finally followed. He grew breathless with delight as the cool water stole soothingly around his body. He wanted it over his back, too, so went farther out. Then he felt that the water could hold him up, and began to swim. He swam all around Karr, ducking and snorting, perfectly at home in the water.

When they were on shore again the dog asked if they had not better go home now.

'It's a long time until morning,' said Grayskin, 'so we can tramp about the forest a little longer.'

They went again into the pine wood. Presently they came to an open glade illuminated by the moonlight, where grass and flowers shimmered beneath the dew. Some large animals were grazing on this forest meadow—an elk bull, several elk cows, and a number of elk calves. When Grayskin caught sight of them he stopped short. He hardly glanced at the cows or the young ones, but stared at the old bull, which had broad antlers with many points, a high hump, and a long-haired flap of skin hanging down from his throat.

'What kind of an animal is that?' asked Grayskin in wonderment.

'He is called Antler-Crown,' said Karr, 'and he is your kinsman. One of these days you, too, will have broad antlers, like those, and just such a mane; and if you were to remain in the forest, very likely you, also, would have a herd to lead.'

'If he is my kinsman, I must go closer and have a look at him,' said Grayskin. 'I never dreamed that an animal could be so stately!'

Grayskin walked over to the elk, but almost immediately he came back to Karr, who had remained at the edge of the clearing.

'You were not very well received, were you?' said Karr.

'I told him that this was the first time I had run across any of my kinsmen, and asked if I might walk with them on their meadow. But he drove me back, threatening me with his antlers.'

'You did right to retreat,' said Karr. 'A young elk bull with only small antlers must be careful about fighting with an old elk. Another would have disgraced his name in the whole forest by retreating without resistance, but such things needn't worry you who are going to move to a foreign land.'

Karr had barely finished speaking when Grayskin turned and walked down to the meadow. The old elk came toward him, and instantly they began to fight. Their antlers met and clashed, and Grayskin was driven backward over the whole meadow. Apparently he did not know how to make use of his strength; but when he came to the edge of the forest he planted his feet firmly on the ground, pushed hard with his antlers, and began to force Antler-Crown back.



Their antlers met and clashed

Grayskin fought quietly, while Antler-Crown puffed and snorted. The old elk, in his turn, was now being forced backward over the meadow. Suddenly a loud crash was heard. One of the old elk's antlers had snapped. He tore himself loose, and dashed into the forest.

Karr was still standing at the forest border when Grayskin came along.

'Now that you have seen what there is in the forest,' said Karr, 'will you come home with me?'

'Yes, it's about time,' said the elk.

Both were silent on the way home. Karr sighed several times, as if he was disappointed about something; but Grayskin stepped along—his head in the air—and seemed delighted with the adventure. He walked ahead unhesitatingly until they came to the enclosure. There he paused. He looked in at the narrow pen where he had lived till now; saw the beaten ground, the stale fodder, the little trough where he had drunk water, and the dark shed in which he had slept.

'The elk are one with the forest!' he cried. Then he threw back his head, so that his neck rested against his back, and rushed wildly into the woods.

HELPLESS, THE GRASS-SNAKE

In a pine thicket in the heart of the Free Forest, every year, in the month of August, there appeared a few greyish-white moths of the kind which are called nun moths. They were small and few in number, and scarcely any one noticed them. When they had fluttered about in the depth of the forest a couple of nights, they laid a few thousand eggs on the branches of trees; and shortly afterwards dropped lifeless to the ground.

When spring came little prickly caterpillars crawled out from the eggs and began to eat the pine-needles. They had good appetites, but they never seemed to do the trees any serious harm, because they were hotly pursued by birds. It was seldom that more than a few hundred caterpillars escaped the pursuers.

The poor things that lived to be full grown crawled up on the branches, spun white webs around themselves, and sat for a couple of weeks as motionless pupae. During this period, as a rule, more than half of them were snatched away. If a hundred nun moths came forth in August, winged and perfect, it was reckoned a good year for them.

This sort of uncertain and obscure existence did the moths lead for many years in the Free Forest. There were no insect folk in the whole country that were so scarce, and they would have remained quite harmless and powerless had they not, most unexpectedly, received a helper.

This fact has some connection with Grayskin's flight from the gamekeeper's lodge. Grayskin roamed the forest that he might become more familiar with the place. Late in the afternoon he happened to squeeze through some thickets behind a clearing where the soil was muddy and slimy, and in the centre of it was a murky pool. This open space was encircled by tall pines almost bare from age and lack of air. Grayskin did not like the place and would have left it at once had he not caught sight of some bright green calla leaves which grew near the pool.

As he bent his head toward the calla stands he happened to disturb a big black snake, which lay sleeping under them. Grayskin had heard Karr speak of the poisonous adders that were to be found in the forest.

So when the snake raised its head, shot out its tongue, and hissed at him, he thought he had encountered an awfully dangerous reptile. He was terrified and, raising his foot, he struck so hard with his hoof that he crushed the snake's head. Then away he ran in hot haste.

As soon as Grayskin had gone, another snake, just as long and as black as the first, came up from the pool. It crawled over to the dead one and licked the poor, crushed-in head.

'Can it be true that you are dead, old Harmless?' hissed the snake. 'We two have lived together so many years; we two have been so happy with each other, and have fared so well here in the swamp, that we have lived to be older than all the other grass-snakes in the forest! This is the worst sorrow that could have befallen me!'

The snake was so broken-hearted that his long body writhed as if it had been wounded. Even the frogs, who lived in constant fear of him, were sorry for him..

'What a wicked creature he must be to murder a poor grass-snake that cannot defend itself!' hissed the snake. 'He certainly deserves a severe punishment. As sure as my name is Helpless and I'm the oldest grass-snake in the whole forest, I'll be avenged! I shall not rest until that elk lies as dead on the ground as my poor old snake-wife.'

When the snake had made this vow he curled up into a hoop and began to ponder. One can hardly imagine anything that would be more difficult for a poor grass-snake than to wreak vengeance upon a big, strong elk; and old Helpless pondered day and night without finding any solution.

One night, as he lay there with his vengeance-thoughts, he heard a slight rustle over his head. He glanced up

and saw a few light nun moths playing in among the trees.

He followed them with his eyes a long while, then began to hiss loudly to himself, apparently pleased with the thought that had occurred to him—then he fell asleep.

The next morning the grass-snake went over to see Crawlie, the adder, who lived in a stony and hilly part of the Free Forest. He told him all about the death of the old grass-snake, and begged that he who could deal such deadly thrusts would undertake the work of vengeance. But Crawlie was not exactly disposed to go to war with an elk.

‘If I were to attack an elk,’ said the adder, ‘he would instantly kill me. Old Harmless is dead and gone and we can’t bring her back to life, so why should I rush into danger on her account?’

When the grass-snake got this reply he raised his head a whole foot from the ground and hissed furiously.

‘Vish vash! Vish vash!’ he said. ‘It’s a pity that you, who have been blessed with such weapons of defence, should be so cowardly that you don’t dare use them!’

When the adder heard this he, too, got angry.

‘Crawl away, old Helpless!’ he hissed. ‘The poison is in my fangs, but I would rather spare one who is said to be my kinsman.’

But the grass-snake did not move from the spot, and for a long time the snakes lay there hissing insults at each other.

When Crawlie was so angry that he couldn’t hiss, but could only dart his tongue out, the grass-snake changed the subject and began to talk in a very different tone.

‘I had still another errand, Crawlie,’ he said, lowering

his voice to a mild whisper. ‘But now I suppose you are so angry that you wouldn’t care to help me?’

‘If you don’t ask anything foolish of me I shall certainly be at your service.’

‘In the pine-trees down by the swamp live a moth family that flies around all night.’

‘I know all about them,’ remarked Crawlie. ‘What’s up with them now?’

‘They are the smallest insect family in the forest,’ said Helpless, ‘and the most harmless, since the caterpillars content themselves with gnawing only pine-needles.’

‘Yes, I know,’ said Crawlie.

‘I’m afraid those moths will soon be exterminated,’ sighed the grass-snake. ‘There are so many who pick off the caterpillars in the spring.’

Now Crawlie began to understand that the grass-snake wanted the caterpillars for his own purpose, and he answered pleasantly:

‘Do you wish me to say to the owls that they are to leave those pine-tree worms in peace?’

‘Yes, it would be well if you who have some authority in the forest should do this,’ said Helpless.

‘I might also drop a good word for the pine-needle pickers among the thrushes,’ volunteered the adder. ‘I will gladly serve you when you do not demand anything unreasonable.’

‘Now you have given me a good promise, Crawlie,’ said Helpless, ‘and I’m glad that I came to you.’

THE NUN MOTHS

One morning—several years later—Karr lay asleep in the porch. It was in the early summer, the season of light nights, and it was as bright as day, although the

sun was not yet up. Karr was awakened by someone calling his name.

‘Is it you, Grayskin?’ he asked, for he was accustomed to the elk’s nightly visits. Again he heard the call; then he recognized Grayskin’s voice and hastened in the direction of the sound.

Karr heard the elk’s footfalls in the distance as he dashed into the thickest pine wood and straight through the brush, following no trodden path. Karr could not catch up with him, and he had great difficulty in even following the trail. ‘Karr, Karr!’ came the cry, and the voice was certainly Grayskin’s, although it had a ring now which the dog had never heard before.

‘I’m coming, I’m coming!’ the dog responded. ‘Where are you?’

‘Karr, Karr! Don’t you see how it falls and falls?’ said Grayskin.

Then Karr noticed that the pine-needles kept dropping and dropping from the trees, like a steady fall of rain.

‘Yes, I see how it falls,’ he cried, and ran far into the forest in search of the elk.

Grayskin kept running through the thickets, while Karr was about to lose the trail again.

‘Karr, Karr!’ roared Grayskin; ‘can’t you scent that peculiar odour in the forest?’

Karr stopped and sniffed.

He had not thought of it before, but now he remarked that the pines sent forth a much stronger odour than usual.

‘Yes, I catch the scent,’ he said. He did not stop long enough to find out the cause of it, but hurried on after Grayskin.

The elk ran ahead with such speed that the dog could not catch up with him.

‘Karr, Karr!’ he called; ‘can’t you hear the crunching on the pines?’ Now his tone was so plaintive it would have melted a stone.

Karr paused to listen. He heard a faint but distinct ‘tap, tap,’ on the trees. It sounded like the ticking of a watch.

‘Yes, I hear how it ticks,’ cried Karr, and ran no farther. He understood that the elk did not want him to follow, but to take notice of something that was happening in the forest.

Karr was standing beneath the drooping branches of a great pine. He looked carefully at it; the needles moved. He went closer and saw a mass of greyish-white caterpillars creeping along the branches, gnawing off the needles. Every branch was covered with them. The crunch, crunch in the trees came from the working of their busy little jaws. Gnawed-off needles fell to the ground in a continuous shower, and from the poor pines there came such a strong odour that the dog suffered from it.

‘What can be the meaning of this?’ wondered Karr. ‘It’s too bad about the pretty trees! Soon they’ll have no beauty left.’

He walked from tree to tree trying to see what had happened to them.

‘There’s a pine they haven’t touched,’ he thought. But they had taken possession of it, too. ‘And here’s a birch—no, this also! The gamekeeper will not be pleased with this,’ thought Karr.

He ran deeper into the thickets, to learn how far the destruction had spread. Wherever he went he heard the same ticking, scented the same odour, saw the same needle rain. There was no need of his pausing to investigate. He understood it all by these signs. The

little caterpillars were everywhere. The whole forest was being ravaged by them.

All of a sudden he came to a part where there was no odour, and where all was still.

‘Here’s the end of their domain,’ thought the dog, as he paused and glanced about.

But here it was even worse; for the caterpillars had already done their work, and the trees were needless. They were dead. The only thing that covered them was a network of ragged threads, which the caterpillars had spun to use as roads and bridges.

In there, among the dying trees, Grayskin stood waiting for Karr.

He was not alone. With him were four old elk—the most respected in the forest. Karr knew them. They were Crooked-Back, who was a small elk, but had a larger hump than the others; Antler-Crown, who was the most dignified of the elk; Rough-Mane, with the thick coat; and an old long-legged one, Big-and-Strong, who, up till the autumn before, when he got a bullet in his thigh, had been terribly hot-tempered and quarrelsome.

‘What in the world is happening to the forest?’ Karr asked when he came up to the elk. They stood with lowered heads, far protruding upper lips, and looked puzzled.

‘No one can tell,’ answered Grayskin. ‘This insect family used to be the least hurtful of any in the forest, and never before have they done any damage. But these last few years they have been multiplying so fast that now it appears as if the entire forest would be destroyed.’

‘Yes, it looks bad,’ Karr agreed; ‘but I see that the wisest animals in the forest have come together to hold

a consultation. Perhaps you have already found some remedy?’

When the dog said this Crooked-Back solemnly raised his heavy head, pricked up his long ears, and spoke.

‘We have summoned you hither, Karr, that we may learn if the humans know of this devastation.’

‘No,’ said Karr, ‘no human being ever comes thus far into the forest when it’s not hunting time. They know nothing of this misfortune.’

Then Antler-Crown said:

‘We who have lived long in the forest do not think that we can fight this insect pest all by ourselves.’

‘We think one thing is just as bad as the other. After this there will be no peace in the forest,’ put in Rough-Mane.

‘But we can’t let the whole Free Forest go to rack and ruin!’ protested Big-and-Strong. ‘There is no alternative.’

Karr understood that the elk had difficulty in expressing what they wished to say and he tried to help them.

‘Perhaps you want me to let the people know the conditions here?’ he suggested.

All the old elk nodded their heads.

‘It’s most unfortunate that we are obliged to ask help of human beings, but we have no choice.’

A moment later Karr was on his way home. As he ran ahead, deeply distressed over all that he had heard and seen, a big black grass-snake approached him.

‘Well met in the forest!’ hissed the grass-snake.

‘Well met again!’ snarled Karr, and rushed by without stopping.

The snake turned and tried to catch up to him.

‘Perhaps that creature also is worried about the forest,’ thought Karr, and waited.

Immediately the snake began to talk about the great disaster.

‘There will be an end of peace and quiet in the forest when human beings are called hither,’ said the snake.

‘I’m afraid there will,’ the dog agreed; ‘but the oldest forest dwellers know what they’re about,’ he added.

‘I think I know a better plan,’ said the snake, ‘if I can get the reward I wish.’

‘Are you not the one whom every one around here calls old Helpless?’ said the dog sneeringly.

‘I’m an old inhabitant of the forest,’ said the snake, ‘and I know how to get rid of such plagues.’

‘If you clear the forest of that pest I feel sure you can have anything you ask for,’ said Karr.

The snake did not respond to this until he had crawled under a tree stump, where he was well protected. Then he said:

‘Tell Grayskin that if he will leave Free Forest for ever, and go far north, where no oak-tree grows, and not return here as long as old Helpless is alive, I will send sickness and death to all the creeping things that gnaw the pines and spruces!’

‘What’s that you say?’ asked Karr, bristling up. ‘What harm has Grayskin ever done you?’

‘He has slain the one whom I loved best,’ the snake declared, ‘and I want to be avenged.’

Before the snake had finished speaking, Karr made a dash for him; but the reptile lay safely hidden under the tree stump.

‘Stay where you are!’ Karr concluded. ‘We’ll manage to drive out the caterpillars without your help.’

The next day the proprietor and the gamekeeper went along a forest path. At first Karr was running by their

side, but after a while he disappeared, and soon after a loud barking was heard from the forest.

‘It’s Karr after game,’ said the proprietor.

The gamekeeper would not believe it.

‘Karr hasn’t hunted for years,’ he said. He went into the forest to see what dog it was, and the other man went after him.

They followed the sound of the barking into the thick of the forest but there it ceased. They stopped to listen, and then, in the stillness, they heard the crunching sound from the caterpillars’ jaws, saw the rain of the needles, and became aware of the strong smell. They noticed also that all the trees were covered with the caterpillars of the nun moth, the small vermin that could devastate miles of forest.

THE BIG WAR OF THE MOTHS

The following spring, as Karr was running through the forest one morning, he heard someone behind him calling: ‘Karr! Karr!’

He turned and saw an old fox standing outside his lair.

‘You must tell me if the humans are doing anything for the forest,’ said the fox.

‘Yes, you may be sure they are!’ said Karr. ‘They are working as hard as they can.’

‘They have killed off all my kinsfolk, and they’ll be killing me next,’ said the fox. ‘But they shall be pardoned for that if only they save the forest.’

That year Karr never ran into the woods without meeting some animal which asked if the humans could save the forest. It was not easy for the dog to answer; the people themselves were not certain that they could conquer the moths. But considering how feared and

hated old Kolmården had always been, it was remarkable that every day more than a hundred men went there, and worked to save the trees from destruction. They cleared away the underbrush. They felled dead trees, lopped off branches from the live ones so that the caterpillars could not easily crawl from tree to tree; they also cut away the forest round the ravaged parts and put up lime-washed fences to keep them out of new territory. Then they painted rings of lime round the trunks of trees to prevent the caterpillars leaving those they had already stripped. The idea was to force them to remain where they were until they starved to death.

The people worked in the forest until far into the spring. They were hopeful, and could hardly wait for the caterpillars to come out from their eggs, feeling certain that they had shut them in so effectually that most of them would die of starvation.

But in the early summer the caterpillars came out, more numerous than ever.

They were everywhere! They crawled on the country roads, on fences, on the walls of cottages. They wandered outside the confines of the Free Forest to other parts of Kolmården.

‘They won’t stop till all our forests are destroyed!’ sighed the people, who were in great despair, and could not enter the forest without weeping.

Karr was so sick of the sight of all these creeping, gnawing things that he could hardly bear to step outside the door. But one day he felt that he must go and find out how Grayskin was getting on. He took the shortest cut to the elk’s haunts, and hurried along—his nose close to the earth. When he came to the tree stump where he had met Helpless the year before, the snake was still there, and called to him.

'Have you told Grayskin what I said to you when last we met?' asked the grass-snake.

Karr only growled and tried to get at him.

'If you haven't told him, by all means do so!' insisted the snake. 'You must see that the humans know of no cure for this plague.'

'Neither do you!' retorted the dog, and ran on.

Karr found Grayskin, but the elk was so low-spirited that he scarcely greeted the dog. He began at once to talk of the forest.

'I don't know what I wouldn't give if this misery were only at an end,' he said.

'Now I shall tell you that 'tis said you could save the forest.' Then Karr delivered the grass-snake's message.

'If any one but Helpless had promised this I should immediately go into exile,' declared the elk. 'But how can a poor grass-snake have the power to work such a miracle?'

'Of course it's only a bluff,' said Karr. 'Grass-snakes always like to pretend that they know more than other creatures.'

When Karr was ready to go home, Grayskin accompanied him part of the way. Presently Karr heard a thrush, perched on a pine top, cry:

'There goes Grayskin, who has destroyed the forest!
There goes Grayskin, who has destroyed the forest!'

Karr thought that he had not heard correctly, but the next moment a hare came darting across the path. When the hare saw them, he stopped, flapped his ears, and screamed:

'Here comes Grayskin, who has destroyed the forest!' Then he ran as fast as he could.

'What do they mean by that?' asked Karr.

'I really don't know,' said Grayskin. 'I think that

the small forest animals are displeased with me because I was the one who proposed that we should ask help of human beings. When the underbrush was cut down, all their lairs and hiding-places were destroyed.'

They walked on together a while longer, and Karr heard the same cry coming from all directions:

'There goes Grayskin, who has destroyed the forest!'

Grayskin pretended not to hear it; but Karr understood why the elk was so down-hearted.

'I say, Grayskin, what does the grass-snake mean by saying you killed the one he loved best?'

'How can I tell?' said Grayskin. 'You know very well that I never kill anything.'

Shortly after that they met the four old elk—Crooked-Back, Antler-Crown, Rough-Mane, and Big-and-Strong—who were coming along slowly, one after the other.

'Well met in the forest!' called Grayskin.

'Well met in turn!' answered the elk.

'We were just looking for you, Grayskin, to consult with you about the forest.'

'The fact is,' began Crooked-Back, 'we have been informed that a crime has been committed here, and that the whole forest is being destroyed because the criminal has not been punished.'

'What kind of a crime was it?'

'Someone killed a harmless creature that he couldn't eat. Such an act is accounted a crime in the Free Forest.'

'Who could have done such a cowardly thing?' wondered Grayskin.

'They say that an elk did it, and we were just going to ask if you knew who it was.'

'No,' said Grayskin, 'I have never heard of an elk killing a harmless creature.'

Grayskin parted from the four old elk and went on with Karr. He was silent and walked with lowered head. They happened to pass Crawlie, the adder, who lay on his shelf of rock.

‘There goes Grayskin, who has destroyed the forest!’ hissed Crawlie, like all the rest.

By that time Grayskin’s patience was exhausted. He walked up to the snake and raised a forefoot.

‘Do you think of crushing me as you crushed the old grass-snake?’ hissed Crawlie.

‘Did I kill a grass-snake?’ asked Grayskin, astonished.

‘The first day you were in the forest you killed the wife of poor old Helpless,’ said Crawlie.

Grayskin turned quickly from the adder and continued his walk with Karr. Suddenly he stopped.

‘Karr, it was I who committed that crime! I killed a harmless creature; therefore it is on my account that the forest is being destroyed.’

‘What are you saying?’ Karr interrupted.

‘You may tell the grass-snake, Helpless, that Gray-skin goes into exile to-night!’

‘That I shall never tell him!’ protested Karr. ‘The Far North is a dangerous country for elk.’

‘Do you think that I wish to remain here when I have caused a disaster like this?’ protested Grayskin.

‘Don’t be rash! Sleep over it before you do anything!’

‘It was you who taught me that the elk are one with the forest,’ said Grayskin, and so saying he parted from Karr.

The dog went home alone; but this talk with Gray-skin troubled him, and the next morning he returned to the forest to seek him, but Grayskin was not to be found, and the dog did not search long for him. He realized

that the elk had taken the snake at his word and had gone into exile.

On his walk home Karr was too unhappy for words. He could not understand why Grayskin should allow that wretch of a grass-snake to trick him away. He had never heard of such folly! 'What power can that old Helpless have?'

As Karr walked along, his mind full of these thoughts, he happened to see the gamekeeper, who stood pointing up at a tree.

'What are you looking at?' asked a man who stood beside him.

'Sickness has come among the caterpillars,' said the gamekeeper.

Karr was astonished, but he was even more angered that the snake had the power to keep his word. Grayskin would have to stay away a long time, for of course the grass-snake would never die.

At the very height of his grief a thought came to Karr which comforted him a little.

'Perhaps the grass-snake won't live so long, after all,' he thought. 'Surely he cannot always lie protected under a tree root. As soon as he has cleaned out the caterpillars I know someone who is going to bite his head off!'

It was true that an illness had made its appearance among the caterpillars. The first summer it did not spread much. It had only just broken out when it was time for the larvae to turn into pupae. From the latter came millions of moths. They flew around in the trees like a blinding snowstorm, and laid countless numbers of eggs. An even greater destruction was prophesied for the following year.

The destruction came not only to the forest, but also

to the caterpillars. The sickness spread quickly from forest to forest. The sick caterpillars stopped eating, crawled up to the branches of the trees, and died there.

There was great rejoicing among the people when they saw them die, but there was even greater rejoicing among the forest animals.

From day to day the dog Karr went about with savage glee, thinking of the hour when he might venture to kill Helpless.

But the caterpillars, meanwhile, had spread over miles of pine woods. Not in one summer did the disease reach them all. Many lived to become pupae and moths.

Grayskin sent messages to his friend Karr by the birds of passage, to say that he was alive and faring well. But the birds told Karr that on several occasions Gray-skin had been pursued by poachers, and that only with the greatest difficulty had he escaped.

Karr lived in a state of continual grief, yearning, and anxiety. Yet he had to wait two whole summers more before there was an end of the caterpillars.

Karr no sooner heard the gamekeeper say that the forest was out of danger than he started on a hunt for Helpless. But when he was in the thick of the forest he made a frightful discovery: He could not hunt any more, he could not run, he could not track his enemy, and he could not see at all!

During the long years of waiting old age had overtaken Karr. He had grown old without having noticed it. He had not the strength even to kill a grass-snake. He was not able to save his friend Grayskin from his enemy.

RETRIBUTION

One afternoon Akka from Kebnekaise and her flock of wild geese alighted on the shore of a forest lake.

Spring was late—as it always is in the mountain districts. Ice covered all the lake save a narrow strip next the land. The geese at once plunged into the water to bathe and hunt for food. In the morning Nils Holgersson had dropped one of his wooden shoes, so he went down by the alders and birches that grew along the shore, to look for something to bind round his foot.

The boy walked quite a distance before he found anything that he could use. He glanced about nervously, for he did not like being alone in the forest.

‘Give me the plains and the lakes!’ he thought. ‘There you can see what you are likely to meet. Now if this were a beech forest it would be well enough, for then the ground would be almost bare; but how people can like these wild, pathless forests of birch and pine is incomprehensible to me. If I owned this land I would chop down every tree.’

At last he caught sight of a piece of birch bark, and just as he was fitting it to his foot he heard a rustle behind him. He turned quickly. A snake darted from the brush straight toward him.

The snake was uncommonly long and thick, but the boy soon saw that it had a white spot on each cheek.

‘Why, it’s only a grass-snake,’ he laughed; ‘it can’t harm me.’

But the next instant the snake gave him a powerful blow on the chest that knocked him down. The boy was on his feet in a second and running away, but the snake was after him. The ground was stony and



He heard a rustle behind him

scrubby; the boy could not proceed very fast; and the snake was close at his heels.

Then Nils saw a big rock in front of him and began to scale it.

'I do hope the snake can't follow me here,' he thought, but he had no sooner reached the top of the rock than he saw that the snake was following him.

Quite close to the boy, on a narrow ledge at the top of the rock, lay a round stone as large as a man's head. As the snake came closer the boy ran behind the stone and gave it a push. It rolled right down on the snake, drawing it along to the ground, where it landed on its head.

'That stone did its work well,' thought the boy with a sigh of relief, as he saw the snake squirm a little and then lie perfectly still.

'I don't think I've been in greater peril on the whole journey,' he said.

He had hardly recovered from the shock when he heard a rustle above him, and saw a bird circling through the air to light on the ground right beside the snake. The bird was like a crow in size and form, but was dressed in a pretty coat of shiny black feathers.

Nils cautiously retreated into a crack in the rock. His adventure in being kidnapped by crows was still fresh in his memory, and he did not care to show himself when there was no need for it.

The bird strode backwards and forwards beside the snake's body, and turned it over with his beak. Finally he flapped his wings and began to shriek in ear-splitting tones:

'It is certainly Helpless, the grass-snake, that lies dead here!' Once more he walked the length of the snake;

then he stood in a deep study and scratched his neck with his foot.

‘It isn’t possible that there can be two such big snakes in the forest,’ he pondered. ‘It must surely be Helpless.’

He was just going to peck the snake but suddenly checked himself.

‘Don’t be a fool, Bataki!’ he remarked to himself. ‘Surely you can’t be thinking of eating the snake until you have called Karr! He wouldn’t believe that Helpless was dead unless he could see it with his own eyes.’

The boy tried to keep quiet, but the bird was so ludicrously solemn, as he stalked back and forth chattering to himself, that he had to laugh.

The bird heard him and, with a flap of his wings, he was up on the rock. The boy rose quickly and walked toward him.

‘Are you not the one who is called Bataki, the raven? and are you not a friend of Akka from Kebnekaise?’ asked the boy.

The bird regarded him intently, then nodded three times.

‘Surely you’re not the little chap who flies round with the wild geese, and whom they call Tummetott?’

‘Well, you’re not so far out,’ said the boy.

‘What luck that I should have run across you! Perhaps you can tell me who killed this grass-snake?’

‘The stone which I rolled down on him killed him,’ replied the boy, and related how the whole thing happened.

‘That was cleverly done for one who is as tiny as you are!’ said the raven. ‘I have a friend in these parts who will be glad to know that this snake has been killed, and I should like to render you a service in return.’

‘Then tell me why you are glad the grass-snake is dead,’ responded the boy.

‘It’s a long story,’ said the raven; ‘you wouldn’t have the patience to listen to it.’

But the boy insisted that he had, and then the raven told him the whole story about Karr and Grayskin and Helpless, the grass-snake. When he had finished the boy sat quietly for a moment, looking straight ahead. Then he spoke:

‘I seem to like the forest better since hearing this. I wonder if there is anything left of the old Free Forest.’

‘Most of it has been destroyed,’ said Bataki. ‘The trees look as if they had passed through a fire. They’ll have to be cleared away, and it will take many years before the forest will be what it once was.’

‘That snake deserved his death!’ declared the boy. ‘But I wonder if he could possibly have been so wise that he could send sickness to the caterpillars.’

‘Perhaps he knew that they frequently become sick in that way,’ suggested Bataki.

‘Yes, that may be; but all the same I must say that he was a very wily snake.’

The boy stopped talking because he saw the raven was not listening to him, but sitting with gaze averted. ‘Hark!’ he said. ‘Karr is in the vicinity. Won’t he be happy when he sees that Helpless is dead!’

The boy turned his head in the direction of the sound.

‘He’s talking with the wild geese,’ he said.

‘Oh, you may be sure that he has dragged himself down to the strand to get the latest news about Grayskin!’

Both the boy and the raven jumped to the ground and hastened down to the shore. All the geese had come out of the lake and stood talking with an old dog, who was so weak and decrepit that it seemed as if he might drop dead at any moment.

‘There’s Karr,’ said Bataki to the boy. ‘Let him hear first what the wild geese have to say to him; later we shall tell him that the grass-snake is dead.’

Presently they heard Akka talking to Karr.

‘It happened last year while we were making our usual spring trip,’ remarked the leader-goose. ‘We started out one morning—Yksi, Kaksi, and I—and we flew over the great boundary forests between Dalecarlia and Hälsingford. Under us we saw only thick pine forests. The snow was still deep among the trees, and the rivers were mostly frozen.

‘Suddenly we noticed three poachers down in the forest. They were on skis, had dogs in leash, carried knives in their belts, but had no guns.

‘As there was a hard crust on the snow they did not bother to take the winding forest paths, but skied straight ahead. Apparently they knew very well where they must go to find what they were seeking.

‘We wild geese flew on, high up in the air, so that the whole forest under us was visible. When we sighted the poachers we wanted to find out where the game was, so we circled up and down, peering through the trees. Then, in a dense thicket, we saw something that looked like big, moss-covered rocks, but couldn’t be rocks, for there was no snow on them.

‘We shot down, suddenly, and then alighted in the centre of the thicket. The three rocks moved. They were three elk—a bull and two cows—resting in the bleak forest.

‘When we alighted the elk bull rose and came toward us. He was the most superb animal we had ever seen. When he saw that it was only some poor wild geese that had awakened him he lay down again.

“‘No, old grandfather, you mustn’t go back to sleep !’”

I cried. "Flee as fast as you can! There are poachers in the forest, and they are bound for this very elk family."

"Thank you, goose mother!" said the elk. He seemed to be dropping to sleep while he was speaking. "But surely you must know that we elk are under the protection of the law at this time of the year. Those poachers are probably out for fox," he yawned.

"There are plenty of fox trails in the forest, but the poachers did not look at them. Believe me, old grandfather! They know that you are lying here, and are coming to attack you. They have no guns with them—only spears and knives—for they dare not fire a shot at this season."

The elk bull lay there calmly, but the elk cows seemed to feel uneasy.

"It may be as the geese say," they remarked, beginning to rise.

"You just lie down!" said the elk bull. "There are no poachers coming here; of that you may be certain."

There was nothing more to be done, so we wild geese rose again into the air. But we continued to circle over the place to see how it would turn out for the elk.

We had hardly reached our regular flying altitude when we saw the elk bull come out from the thicket. He sniffed the air a little, then walked straight toward the poachers. As he strode along he stepped upon dry twigs that crackled noisily. A big barren marsh lay before him. Thither he went and took his stand in the middle, where there was nothing to hide him from view.

There he stood until the poachers emerged from the woods. Then he turned and fled in the opposite direction. The poachers let loose the dogs, and they themselves skied after him at full speed.

'The elk threw back his head and loped as fast as he could. He kicked up snow until it flew like a blizzard about him. Both dogs and men were left far behind. Then the elk stopped, as if to await their approach. When they were within sight he dashed ahead again. We understood that he was purposely tempting the hunters away from the place where the cows were. We thought it brave of him to face danger himself in order that those who were dear to him might be left in safety. None of us wanted to leave the place until we had seen how all this was to end.

'Thus the chase continued for two hours or more. We wondered that the poachers went to the trouble of pursuing the elk when they were not armed with rifles. They couldn't have thought that they could succeed in tiring out a runner like him!

'Then we noticed that the elk no longer ran so rapidly. He stepped on the snow more carefully, and every time he lifted his feet blood could be seen in his tracks.

'We understood why the poachers had been so persistent. They had counted on help from the snow. The elk was heavy, and with every step he sank to the bottom of the drift. The hard crust on the snow was scraping his legs. It scraped away the fur and tore out pieces of flesh, so that he was in torture every time he put his foot down.

'The poachers and the dogs, who were so light that the ice crust could hold their weight, pursued him all the while. He ran on and on—his steps becoming more and more uncertain and faltering. He gasped for breath. Not only did he suffer intense pain, but he was also exhausted from wading through the deep snowdrifts.

'At last he lost all patience. He paused to let poachers

and dogs come upon him, and was ready to fight them. As he stood there waiting he glanced upward. When he saw us wild geese circling above him, he cried out:

“Stay here, wild geese, until all is over! And the next time you fly over Kolmården look up Karr, and ask him if he doesn’t think that his friend Grayskin has met with a happy end?”

When Akka had gone so far in her story the old dog rose and walked nearer to her.

‘Grayskin led a good life,’ he said. ‘He understands me. He knows that I’m a brave dog and that I shall be glad to hear that he had a happy end. Now tell me how—’

He raised his tail and threw back his head, as if to give himself a bold and proud bearing, then he collapsed.

‘Karr! Karr!’ called a man’s voice from the forest. The old dog rose obediently.

‘My master is calling me,’ he said, ‘and I must not tarry longer. I just saw him load his gun. Now we two are going into the forest for the last time.

‘Many thanks, wild goose! I know everything that I need know and can die content.’

PART TWO

MARKET EVE

IT WAS the day before the big Cattle Fair at Örebro; it rained in torrents and people thought: 'This is exactly as in the time of Ysätter-Kaisa the storm-witch! At fairs she used to be more prankish than usual. It is just the sort of thing she would do to arrange a downpour like this on a market eve.'

As the day wore on the rain increased, and toward evening came regular cloud-bursts. The roads were like bottomless swamps. The farmers who had started from home with their cattle early in the morning, that they might arrive at a seasonable hour, fared badly. Cows and oxen were so tired they could hardly move, and many of the poor beasts dropped down in the middle of the road, to show that they were too exhausted to go any farther. All who lived along the roadside had to open their doors to the market-bound travellers, and harbour them as best they could. Farmhouses, barns, and sheds were soon crowded to their limit.

Meanwhile those who could struggle along toward the inn did so; but when they arrived they wished they had stopped at some cottage along the road. All the cribs in the cowshed and all the stalls in the stable were already occupied. There was no other choice than to let horses and cattle stand out in the rain. Their masters could barely manage to get under cover.

The crush and mud and slush in the barn-yard were frightful! Some of the animals were standing in puddles and could not even lie down. There were thoughtful

masters, of course, who procured straw for their animals to lie on, and spread blankets over them; but there were those, also, who sat in the inn, drinking and gambling, entirely forgetful of the dumb creatures which they should have protected.

Nils and the wild geese had come to a little wooded island in Hjälmar Lake that evening. The island was separated from the mainland by a narrow and shallow sound, and when the water was low one could pass over it dry-shod.

It rained just as hard on the island as it did everywhere else. The boy could not sleep for the water that kept dripping down on him. Finally he got up and began to walk. He thought he felt the rain less when he moved about.

He had hardly circled the island when he heard a splashing in the water. Presently he saw a solitary horse tramping among the trees. Never in all his life had he seen such a wreck of a horse. He was broken-winded and stiff-kneed and so thin that every rib could be seen under the hide. He bore neither harness nor saddle—only an old bridle, from which dangled a half-rotted rope-end. Obviously he had had no difficulty in breaking loose.

The horse walked straight toward the spot where the wild geese were sleeping. Nils was afraid that he would step on them.

‘Where are you going? Feel your ground!’ he shouted.

‘Oh, there you are!’ exclaimed the horse. ‘I’ve walked miles to meet you!’

‘Have you heard of me?’ asked the boy, astonished.

‘I’ve got ears, even if I am old! There are many who talk of you nowadays.’

As he spoke the horse bent his head that he might see better, and the boy noticed that he had a small head, beautiful eyes, and a soft, sensitive nose.

'He must have been a good horse at the start, though he has come to grief in his old age,' he thought.

'I wish you would come with me and help me with something,' pleaded the horse.

The boy thought it would be risky to accompany a creature who looked so wretched, and excused himself on account of the bad weather.

'You'll be no worse off on my back than you are lying here,' said the horse. 'But perhaps you don't dare to go with an old tramp of a horse like me.'

'Certainly I dare!' said the boy.

'Then wake the geese so that we can arrange with them where they shall come for you to-morrow,' said the horse.

The boy was soon seated on the animal's back. The old nag trotted along better than he had thought possible. It was a long ride in the rain and darkness before they halted near a large inn, where everything looked terribly uninviting. The wheel tracks were so deep in the road that Nils feared he might drown should he fall down into them. Alongside the fence, which enclosed the yard, some thirty or forty horses and cattle were tied, with no protection against the rain, and in the yard were wagons piled with packing cases, where sheep, calves, pigs, and chickens were shut in.

The horse walked over to the fence and stood there. The boy remained seated upon his back, and, with his good night eyes, plainly saw how badly the animals fared.

'How do you happen to be standing out here in the rain?' he asked.

‘We’re on our way to a fair at Örebro, but we were obliged to put up here on account of the rain. This is an inn; but so many travellers have already arrived that there’s no room for us in the barns.’

The boy made no reply but sat quietly looking about him. Not many of the animals were asleep, and on all sides he heard complaints and indignant protests. They had reason enough for grumbling, for the weather was even worse than it had been earlier in the day. A freezing wind had begun to blow, and the rain which came beating down on them was turning to snow. It was easy enough to understand what the horse wanted the boy to help him with.

‘Do you see that fine farmyard directly opposite the inn?’ asked the horse.

‘Yes, I see it,’ answered the boy, ‘and I can’t understand why they haven’t tried to find shelter for all of you in there. They are already full, perhaps?’

‘No, there are no strangers in that place,’ said the horse. ‘The people who live on that farm are so stingy and selfish that it would be useless for any one to ask them for shelter.’

‘If that’s the case I suppose you’ll have to stand where you are.’

‘I was born and raised on that farm,’ said the horse; ‘I know that there is a large stable and a big cowshed, with many empty stalls, and I was wondering if you couldn’t manage in some way or other to get us in over there.’

‘I don’t think I could venture,’ hesitated the boy. But he felt so sorry for the poor beasts that he wanted at least to try.

He ran into the strange barn-yard and saw at once that all the outhouses were locked and the keys gone.

He stood there, puzzled and helpless, when aid came to him from an unexpected source. A gust of wind came sweeping along with terrific force and flung open a barn door right in front of him.

The boy was not long in getting back to the horse.

'It isn't possible to get into the stable or the cow house,' he said, 'but there's a big, empty hay shed that they have forgotten to bolt. I can lead you into that.'

'Thank you,' said the horse. 'It will seem good to sleep once more on familiar ground. It's the only happiness I can expect in this life.'

Meanwhile, at the flourishing farm opposite the inn, the family sat up much later than usual that evening.

The master of the place was a man of thirty-five, tall and dignified, with a handsome but melancholy face. During the day he had been out in the rain and had got wet, like every one else, and at supper he asked his old mother, who was still mistress of the place, to light a fire on the hearth that he might dry his clothes. The mother kindled a feeble blaze—for in that house they were not wasteful with wood—and the master hung his coat on the back of a chair and placed it before the fire. With one foot on the hearthstone and a hand resting on his knee he stood gazing into the fire. Thus he stood for two whole hours, making no move other than to throw a log on the fire now and then.

The mistress removed the supper things and turned down his bed for the night before she went to her own room and seated herself. At intervals she came to the door and looked wonderingly at her son.

'It's nothing, mother. I'm only thinking,' he said..

His thoughts were on something that had occurred shortly before: When he passed the inn a horse-dealer had asked him if he would not like to purchase a horse,

and had shown him an old nag so weather-beaten that he asked the dealer if he took him for a fool, since he wished to palm off such a played-out beast on him.

‘Oh, no!’ said the horse-dealer. ‘I only thought that, as the horse once belonged to you, you might wish to give him a comfortable home in his old age; he has need of it.’

Then he looked at the horse and recognized it as one which he himself had raised and broken in; but it did not occur to him to purchase such an old and useless creature on that account. No, indeed! He was not one who squandered money.

All the same, the sight of the horse had awakened many memories—and it was the memories that kept him awake.

That horse had been a fine animal. His father had let him tend it from the start. He had broken it in and had loved it above everything else. His father had complained that he used to feed it too well, and often he had been obliged to steal out and smuggle oats to it.

Once he ventured to talk to his father about letting him buy a broadcloth suit, and have the cart painted. His father stood as if petrified and he thought the old man would have a stroke. He tried to make his father understand that when he had a fine horse to drive he should look presentable himself.

The father made no reply, but two days later he took the horse to Örebro and sold it.

It was cruel of him. But it was plain that his father had feared that this horse might lead him into vanity and extravagance. And now, so long afterward, he had to admit that his father was right. A horse like that surely would have been a temptation. At first he had grieved terribly over his loss. Many a time he had gone

down to Örebro, just to stand at a street corner and see the horse pass by, or to steal into the stable and give him a lump of sugar. He thought: 'If ever I get the farm, the first thing I do will be to buy back my horse.'

Now his father was gone and he himself had been master for over two years, but he had not made a move toward buying the horse. He had not thought of him for ever so long, until to-night.

It was strange that he should have forgotten the beast so entirely.

His father had been a very headstrong, domineering man. When his son was grown up and the two had worked together, the father had gained absolute power over him. The boy had come to think that everything his father did was right, and after he became the master he only tried to do exactly as his father would have done.

He knew, of course, that people said his father was stingy; but it was well to keep a tight hold on one's purse and not throw away money needlessly. The goods one had received should not be wasted. It was better to live on a debt-free place and be called stingy than to carry heavy mortgages like other farm owners.

He had gone so far in his mind when he was called back by a strange sound. It was as if a shrill, mocking voice were repeating his thoughts: 'It is better to live on a debt-free place and be called stingy than to carry heavy mortgages like other farm owners.'

It sounded as if someone was trying to make sport of his wisdom, and he was about to lose his temper when he realized that it was all a mistake. The wind was beginning to rage, and he had been standing there getting so sleepy that he mistook the howling of the wind in the chimney for human speech.

He glanced up at the wall clock which just then struck eleven.

'It's time that you were in bed,' he remarked to himself. Then he remembered that he had not yet gone the rounds of the farmyard, as it was his custom to do every night, to make sure that all doors were closed and all lights extinguished. This was something he had never neglected since he became master. He drew on his coat and went out in the storm.

He found everything as it should be, save that the door to the empty hay shed had been blown open by the wind. He stepped inside for the key, locked the shed door, and put the key into his coat pocket. Then he went back to the house, removed his coat, and hung it before the fire. Even now he did not go to bed, but began pacing the floor. The storm without, with its biting wind and snow-blended rain, was terrible, and his old horse was standing in this storm without so much as a blanket to protect him! He should at least have given his old friend a roof over his head, since he had come such a long distance.

At the inn across the way Nils heard an old wall clock strike eleven times. Just then he was untying the animals to lead them to the shed in the farmyard opposite. It took some time to rouse them and get them into line. When all were ready they marched in a long procession into the stingy farmer's yard, with the boy as their guide.

But while the boy had been assembling them the farmer had gone the rounds of the farmyard and locked the hay shed, so that when the animals came along the door was closed. The boy stood there dismayed. He could not let the creatures stand out there! He must go into the house and find the key.

‘Keep them quiet out here while I go in and fetch the key,’ he said to the old horse, and off he ran.

On the path right in front of the house he paused to think out how he should get inside. As he stood there he noticed two little wanderers coming down the road, who stopped before the inn.

The boy saw at once that they were two little girls and ran toward them, thinking that they might help him.

‘Come now, Britta Maja!’ said one, ‘you mustn’t cry any more. Now we are at the inn. Here they will surely take us in.’

The girl had but just said this when the boy called to her:

‘No, you mustn’t try to get in there. It is simply impossible. But at the farmhouse opposite there are no guests. Go there instead.’

The little girls heard the words distinctly, though they could not see the one who spoke to them. They did not wonder much at that, however, for the night was as black as pitch. The bigger of the girls promptly answered:

‘We don’t want to enter that place, because those who live there are stingy and cruel. It is their fault that we two must go out on the highways and beg.’

‘That may be so,’ said the boy, ‘but all the same you should go there. I am sure it will be all right.’

‘We can try, but it is doubtful that they will even let us enter,’ said the two little girls as they walked up to the house and knocked.

The master was standing by the fire thinking of the horse when he heard the knocking. He went to the door to see what was up, thinking all the while that he would not let himself be tempted into admitting any

wayfarer. As he fumbled the lock, a gust of wind came along, wrenched the door from his hand, and swung it open. To close it he had to step outside on the porch, and, when he stepped back into the house, the two little girls were standing within.

They were two poor beggar girls, ragged, dirty, and starving—two little things bent under the burden of their beggar's packs, which were as large as themselves.

'Who are you that go loitering about at this hour of the night?' said the master gruffly.

The two children did not answer immediately, but first removed their packs. Then they walked up to the man and stretched forth their tiny hands in greeting.

'We are Anna and Britta Maja from Engärdet,' said the elder, 'and we were going to ask for a night's lodging.'

He did not take the outstretched hands, and was just about to drive out the beggar children when a fresh memory faced him. Engärdet—was not that a little cottage where a poor widow with five children had lived? The widow had owed his father a few hundred crowns and in order to get back his money he had sold her cottage. After that the widow, with her three eldest children, went to Norrland to seek employment, and the two youngest became a charge on the parish.

As he called this to mind he grew bitter. He knew that his father had been severely censured for squeezing out that money, which by right belonged to him.

'What are you doing nowadays?' he asked in a cross tone. 'Didn't the board of charities take charge of you? Why do you roam around and beg?'

'It's not our fault,' replied the elder girl. 'The people with whom we are living have sent us out to beg.'

'Well, your packs are filled,' the farmer observed, 'so

you can't complain. Now you'd better take out some of the food you have with you and eat your fill, for here you'll get no food, as all the women are in bed. Later you may lie down in the corner by the hearth, so you won't have to freeze.'

He waved his hand, as if to ward them off, and his eyes took on a hard look. He was thankful that he had had a father who had been careful of his property. Otherwise he might perhaps have been forced in childhood to run about and beg, as these children now did.

No sooner had he thought this out to the end than the shrill, mocking voice he had heard once before that evening repeated it, word for word.

He listened, and at once understood that it was nothing—only the wind roaring in the chimney. But the queer thing about it was, when the wind repeated his thoughts, they seemed so strangely stupid and hard and false!

The children meanwhile had stretched themselves, side by side, on the floor. They were not quiet, but lay there muttering.

'Do be still, won't you?' he growled, for he was in such an irritable mood that he could have beaten them.

But the mumbling continued, and again he called for silence.

'When mother went away,' piped a clear little voice, 'she made me promise that every night I would say my evening prayer. I must do this, and Britta Maja too. As soon as we have said "God who cares for little children . . ." we'll be quiet.'

The master sat quite still while the little ones said their prayers, then he rose and began pacing back and forth, back and forth, wringing his hands all the while, as though he had met with some great sorrow.

'The horse driven out and wrecked, these two children turned into road beggars—both father's doings! Perhaps father did not do right after all?' he thought.

He sat down again and buried his head in his hands. Suddenly his lips began to quiver and into his eyes came tears, which he hastily wiped away. Fresh tears



came and he was just as prompt to brush these away; but it was useless, for more followed.

At that moment his mother opened the door, and he swung his chair quickly and turned his back to her. She must have noticed something unusual, for she stood quietly behind him a long while, as if waiting for him to speak. She realized how difficult it always is for men to talk of the things they feel most deeply. She must help him of course.

From her bedroom she had observed all that had

taken place in the living-room, so she did not have to ask questions. She walked very softly over to the two sleeping children, lifted them, and carried them to her own bed. Then she went back to her son.

'Lars,' she said, as if she did not see that he was weeping, 'you had better let me keep these children.'

'What, mother?' he gasped, trying to smother the sobs.

'I have been suffering for years—ever since father took the cottage from their mother, and so have you.'

'Yes, but—'

'I want to keep them here and make something of them; they are too good to beg.'

He could not speak, for now the tears were beyond his control; but he took his old mother's withered hand and patted it.

Then he jumped up as if something had frightened him.

'What would father have said of this?'

'Father had his day at ruling,' said the mother. 'Now it is your day. As long as father lived we had to obey him. Now is the time to show what you are.'

Her son was so astonished that he ceased crying.

'But I have just shown what I am!' he said.

'No, you haven't,' protested the mother. 'You only try to be like him. Father experienced hard times, which made him fear poverty. He believed that he had to think of himself first. But you have never had any difficulties that should make you hard. You have more than you need, and it would be unnatural of you not to think of others.'

When the two little girls entered the house Nils slipped in behind them and hid himself in a dark corner. He had not been there long before he caught a glimpse of

the shed key, which the farmer had thrust into his coat pocket.

‘When the master of the house drives the children out, I’ll take the key and run,’ he thought.

But the children were not driven out and the boy crouched in the corner, not knowing what he should do next.

The mother talked long with her son, and while she was speaking he stopped weeping. Gradually his features softened; he looked like another person. All the while he was stroking the wasted old hand.

‘Now we may as well go to bed,’ said the old lady when she saw that he was calm again.

‘No,’ he said, suddenly rising, ‘I cannot do so yet. There’s a stranger outside whom I must shelter to-night !’

He said nothing further, but quickly drew on his coat, lit the lantern, and went out. There were the same wind and chill without, but as he stepped to the porch he began to sing softly. He wondered if the horse would know him, and if he would be glad to come back to his old stable.

As he crossed the house yard he heard a door slam.

‘That shed door has blown open again,’ he thought, and went over to close it.

A moment later he stood by the shed and was just going to shut the door when he heard a rustling within.

Nils, who had watched his opportunity, had run directly to the shed, where he had left the animals. They were no longer out in the rain: a strong wind had long since thrown open the door and helped them to get a roof over their heads. The patter which the master heard was caused by the boy running into the shed.

By the light of the lantern the man could see inside. The whole floor was covered with sleeping cattle. There

was no human being to be seen; the animals were not bound, but were lying, here and there, in the straw.

He was enraged at the intrusion and began storming and shrieking to rouse the sleepers and drive them out. But the animals lay still and would not let themselves be disturbed. The only one that rose was an old horse that came slowly toward him.

All of a sudden the man became silent. He recognized the beast by its gait. He raised the lantern, and the horse came over and laid its head on his shoulder. The master patted and stroked it.

‘My old horse, my old horse!’ he said. ‘What have they done to you? Yes, old chap, I’ll buy you back. You’ll never again have to leave this place. You shall do whatever you like, my horse! Those whom you have brought with you may remain here, but you shall come with me to the stable. Now I can give you all the oats you are able to eat without having to smuggle them. And you’re not all used up, either! The handsomest horse in the parish—that’s what you shall be once more! There, there! There, there!’

PART THREE

THE BREAKING UP OF THE ICE

THE following day the weather was clear and beautiful. There was a strong west wind; people were glad of that, for it dried up the roads, which had been soaked by the heavy rains of the day before.

Early in the morning the two Småland children, Osa, the goose girl, and little Mats, were out on the highway leading from Sörmland to Närke. The road ran alongside the southern shore of Hjälmar Lake and the children were walking along looking at the ice, which covered the greater part of it. The morning sun darted its clear rays upon the ice, which did not look dark and forbidding, like most spring ice, but sparkled temptingly. As far as they could see the ice was firm and dry. The rain had run down into cracks and hollows, or been absorbed by the ice itself. The children saw only the sound ice.

Osa, the goose girl, and little Mats were on their way north, and they could not help thinking of all the steps they would be saved if they could cut straight across the lake instead of going round it. They knew, to be sure, that spring ice is treacherous, but this looked perfectly safe. They could see that it was several inches thick near the shore. They saw a path which they might follow, and the opposite shore appeared to be so near that they ought to be able to get there in an hour.

‘Come, let’s try!’ said little Mats. ‘If we only look before us, so that we don’t go down into some hole, we can do it.’

So they went out on the lake. The ice was not very slippery but quite easy to walk upon. There was more water on it than they had expected, and here and there were cracks, where the water purled up. One had to watch out for such places; but that was easy to do in broad daylight, with the sun shining.

The children advanced rapidly, and talked only of how sensible they were to have gone out on the ice instead of tramping the slushy road.

When they had been walking for a time they came to Vinön Island, where an old woman sighted them from her window. She rushed from her cottage, waved them back, and shouted something which they could not hear. They understood perfectly well that she was warning them not to come any farther; but they thought there was no immediate danger. It would be stupid for them to leave the ice when all was going so well. . . .

Therefore they went on past Vinön and had a stretch of seven miles of ice ahead of them.

Out there was so much water that the children were obliged to take roundabout ways; but that was fun to them. They vied with each other as to which could find the soundest ice. They were neither tired nor hungry. The whole day was before them, and they laughed at each obstacle they met.

Now and then they cast a glance ahead at the farther shore. It still appeared far away, although they had been walking a good hour. They were rather surprised that the lake was so broad.

‘The shore seems to be moving farther away from us,’ little Mats said.

Out there the children were not protected against the wind, which was becoming stronger and stronger every minute, and was pressing their clothing so close to their

bodies that they could hardly go on. The cold wind was the first disagreeable thing they had met with on the journey.

But the amazing part of it was that the wind came sweeping along with a loud roar—as if it brought with



it the noise of a large mill or factory, though nothing of the kind was to be found out there on the ice. They had walked to the west of the big island, Valen; now they thought they were nearing the north shore. But at the same time the wind began to blow more and more, while the loud roaring increased so rapidly that they began to feel uneasy.

All at once it occurred to them that the roar might be caused by the foaming and rushing of the waves

breaking against a shore, although this seemed improbable, since the lake was still covered with ice.

At all events they paused and looked about. They noticed far in the west a white bank which stretched clear across the lake. At first they thought it was a snowbank alongside a road. But then they realized it was the foam-capped waves dashing against the ice. They took hold of hands and ran without saying a word. Open sea lay beyond in the west, and the streak of foam appeared to be moving quickly eastward. They wondered if the ice was going to break all over. What was going to happen? They felt now that they were in great danger.

All at once it seemed as if the ice under their feet rose—rose and sank, as if someone from below were pushing it. Presently they heard a hollow boom, and then there were cracks in the ice all around them. The children could see how quickly they spread all over the ice.

The next moment all was still, then the rising and sinking began again. Thereupon the cracks began to widen into crevices through which the water bubbled up. By and by the crevices became gaps. Soon after that the ice was divided into large floes.

‘Osa,’ said little Mats, ‘this must be the breaking up of the ice!’

‘Why, so it is, little Mats,’ said Osa, ‘but we can still get to land. Run for your life!’

As a matter of fact, the wind and waves had a good deal of work to do yet to clear the ice from the lake. The hardest part was done when the ice-cake burst into pieces, but all these pieces must be broken and hurled against each other, to be crushed, worn down, and dissolved. There was still a great deal of hard and sound ice left, which formed large, unbroken surfaces.

The greatest danger for the children lay in the fact that they had no general view of the ice. They did not see the places where the gaps were so wide that they could not possibly jump over them, nor did they know where to find any floes that would hold them, so they wandered aimlessly back and forth, going farther out on the lake instead of nearer land. At last, confused and terrified, they stood still and wept.

Then a flock of wild geese in rapid flight came rushing by. They shrieked loudly and sharply; but the strange thing was that above the geese-cackle the little children heard these words:

‘You must go to the right, the right, the right!’ They began at once to follow the advice; but before long they were again standing irresolute, facing another broad gap.

Again they heard the geese shrieking above them, and again, amid the geese-cackle, they distinguished a few words:

‘Stand where you are! Stand where you are!’

The children did not say a word to each other but obeyed and stood still. Soon after that the ice-floes floated together, so that they could cross the gap. Then they took hands again and ran. They were afraid not only of the danger, but of the mysterious help that had come to them.

Soon they had to stop again, and immediately the sound of the voice reached them.

‘Straight ahead, straight ahead!’ it said.

This leading continued for about half an hour; by that time they had reached the long Lunger Point, where they left the ice and waded to shore. They were still terribly frightened, even though they were on firm land. They did not stop to look back at the lake—where the waves were pitching the ice-floes faster and faster—

but ran on. When they had gone a short distance along the point Osa paused suddenly.

‘Wait here, little Mats,’ she said; ‘I have forgotten something.’

Osa, the goose girl, went down to the strand again, where she stopped to rummage in her bag. Finally she fished out a little wooden shoe, which she placed on a stone where it could be plainly seen. Then she ran to little Mats without once looking back.

But the instant her back was turned a big white goose shot down from the sky, like a streak of lightning, snatched the wooden shoe, and flew away with it.

PART FOUR

TUMMETOTT AND THE BEARS

WHEN the wild geese and Nils had helped Osa, the goose girl, and little Mats across the ice, they flew into Västmanland.

A strong west wind blew almost the entire day on which the wild geese travelled over the mining districts, and as soon as they attempted to direct their course northward they were buffeted toward the east. Now Akka thought that Smirre Fox was at large in the eastern part of the province; therefore she would not fly in that direction, but turned back, time and again, struggling westward with great difficulty. At this rate the wild geese advanced very slowly, and late in the afternoon they were still in the Västmanland mining districts. Toward evening the wind abated suddenly, and the tired travellers hoped that they would have an interval of easy flight before sundown. Then along came a violent gust of wind, which tossed the geese before it like balls, and Nils, who was sitting comfortably, with no thought of danger, was lifted from the gander's back and hurled into space.

Little and light as he was he could not fall straight to the ground in such a wind; so at first he was carried along with it, drifting down slowly and spasmodically, as a leaf falls from a tree.

‘Why, this isn’t so bad!’ thought the boy as he fell. ‘I’m tumbling as easily as if I were only a scrap of

paper. Morten Gander will doubtless hurry along and pick me up.'

The first thing the boy did when he landed was to tear off his cap and wave it, so that the big white gander should see where he was.

'Here am I, where are you? Here am I, where are you?' he called, and was rather surprised that Morten Gander was not already at his side.

But the big white gander was not to be seen, nor was the wild goose flock outlined against the sky. It had entirely disappeared.

He thought this rather strange, but he was neither worried nor frightened. Not for a second did it occur to him that Akka and Morten Gander would abandon him. The unexpected gust of wind had probably borne them along with it. As soon as they could manage to turn, they would surely come back and fetch him.

But what was this? Where on earth was he anyway? He had been standing gazing toward the sky for some sign of the geese, but now he happened to glance about him. He had not come down on even ground, but had dropped into a deep, wide mountain cave—or whatever it might be. It was as large as a church, with almost perpendicular walls on all four sides, and with no roof at all. On the ground were some huge rocks, between which moss and lingon-brush and dwarfed birches grew. Here and there in the wall were projections, from which swung rickety ladders. At one side there was a dark passage, which apparently led far into the mountain.

The boy had not been travelling over the mining districts a whole day for nothing. He understood at once that the big cleft had been made by the men who had mined ore in this place.

‘I must try and climb back to earth again,’ he thought, ‘otherwise I fear that my companions won’t find me!’

He was about to go over to the wall when someone seized him from behind, and he heard a gruff voice growl in his ear: ‘Who are you?’

The boy turned quickly and, in the confusion of the moment, he thought he was facing a huge rock covered with brownish moss. Then he noticed that the rock had broad paws to walk with, a head, two eyes, and a growling mouth.

He could not pull himself together to answer, nor did the big beast appear to expect it of him, for it knocked him down, rolled him back and forth with its paws, and nosed him. It seemed just about ready to swallow him, when it changed its mind and called:

‘Brumme and Mulle, come here, you cubs, and you shall have something good to eat!’

A pair of furry cubs, as uncertain on their feet and as woolly as puppies, came tumbling along.

‘What have you got, Mamma Bear? May we see, oh, may we see?’ shrieked the cubs excitedly.

‘Oho! so I’ve fallen in with bears,’ thought the boy to himself. ‘Now Smirre Fox won’t have to trouble himself further to chase after me!’

The mother bear pushed the boy along to the cubs. One of them nabbed him quickly and ran off with him; but he did not bite hard. He was playful and wanted to amuse himself awhile with Tummetott before eating him. The other cub was after the first one to snatch the boy for himself, and as he lumbered along he managed to tumble straight down on the head of the one that carried the boy. So the two cubs rolled over each other, biting, clawing, and snarling.

During the tussle the boy got loose, ran over to the

wall, and started to scale it. Then both cubs scurried after him and, nimbly scaling the cliff, they caught up with him and tossed him down on the moss, like a ball.

‘Now I know how a poor little mouse fares when it falls into the cat’s claws,’ thought the boy.

He made several attempts to get away. He ran deep down into the old tunnel and hid behind the rocks and climbed the birches, but the cubs hunted him out, go where he would. The instant they caught him they let him go, so that he could run away again and they should have the fun of recapturing him.

At last the boy got so sick and tired of it all that he threw himself down on the ground.

‘Run away,’ growled the cubs, ‘or we’ll eat you up!’

‘You’ll have to eat me then,’ said the boy, ‘for I can’t run any more.’

Immediately both cubs rushed over to the mother bear and complained:

‘Mamma Bear, oh, Mamma Bear, he won’t play any more.’

‘Then you must divide him evenly between you,’ said Mother Bear.

When the boy heard this he was so scared that he jumped up instantly and began playing again.

When it was bedtime Mother Bear called to the cubs that they must come now and cuddle up to her and go to sleep. They had been having such a good time that they wished to continue their play next day; so they took the boy between them and laid their paws over him. They did not want him to move without waking them. They went to sleep immediately. The boy thought that after a while he would try to steal away. But never in all his life had he been so tumbled and

tossed and hunted and rolled! And he was so tired out that he too fell asleep.

By and by Father Bear came clambering down the mountain wall. The boy was wakened by his tearing away stone and gravel as he swung himself into the old mine. The boy was afraid to move much; but he managed to stretch himself and turn over, so that he could see the big bear. He was a frightfully coarse, huge old beast, with great paws, large, glistening teeth, and wicked little eyes. The boy could not help shuddering as he looked at this old monarch of the forest.

‘It smells like a human being around here,’ said Father Bear the instant he came up to Mother Bear, and his growl was as the rolling of thunder.

‘How can you imagine anything so absurd?’ said Mother Bear without disturbing herself. ‘It has been settled for good and all that we are not to harm mankind any more; but if one of them were to appear here, where the cubs and I have our quarters, there wouldn’t be enough left of him for you to catch even a scent of him!’

Father Bear lay down beside Mother Bear.

But the answer did not seem to satisfy him, for he went on sniffing and smelling.

‘Stop that sniffing,’ said Mother Bear. ‘You ought to know me well enough to understand that I don’t allow anything dangerous to come near the cubs. Talk, instead, of what you have been doing. I haven’t seen you for a whole week!’

‘I’ve been looking about for a new place to live,’ said Father Bear. ‘First I went over to Värmland, to learn from our kinsmen at Ekshärad how they fared in that country; but I had my trouble for nothing. There wasn’t a bear’s den left in the whole forest.’

'I believe the humans want the whole earth to themselves,' said Mother Bear. 'Even if we leave people and cattle in peace and live solely upon lingon and insects and green things, we cannot remain unmolested in the forest. I wonder where we could move in order to live in peace?'

'We've lived comfortably for many years in this pit,' said Father Bear. 'But I can't be happy here now since the big noise-shop has been built right in our neighbourhood. Lately I have been taking a look at the land east of the river Dalälven, over by Garpenberg. Old mine pits are plentiful there, too, and other fine retreats. I thought it looked as if one might be fairly protected against men—'

The instant Father Bear said this he sat up and began to sniff.

'It's extraordinary that whenever I speak of human beings I catch that queer scent again,' he remarked.

'Go and see for yourself if you don't believe me!' challenged Mother Bear. 'I should just like to know where a human being could manage to hide down here?'

The bear walked all around the cave, and nosed. Finally he went back and lay down without a word.

'What did I tell you?' said Mother Bear. 'But of course you think that no one but yourself has any nose or ears!'

'One can't be too careful, with such neighbours as we have,' said Father Bear gently. Then he leaped up with a roar. As luck would have it, one of the cubs had moved a paw over to Nils Holgersson's face and the poor little wretch could not breathe, but began to sneeze. It was impossible for Mother Bear to keep Father Bear back any longer. He pushed the young ones to right and left and caught sight of the boy before he had time to sit up.

He would have swallowed him instantly if Mother Bear had not pushed between them.

‘Don’t touch him! He belongs to the cubs,’ she said. ‘They have had such fun with him the whole evening that they couldn’t bear to eat him up, but wanted to save him until morning.’

Father Bear pushed Mother Bear aside.

‘Don’t meddle with what you don’t understand!’ he roared. ‘Can’t you scent that human smell about him from afar? I shall eat him at once, or he will play us some mean trick.’

He opened his jaws again; but meanwhile Nils had had time to think and, quick as a flash, he dug into his knapsack and brought forth some matches—his sole weapon of defence—struck one on his leather breeches, and stuck the burning match into the bear’s open mouth.

Father Bear snorted when he smelled the sulphur, and with that the flame went out. The boy was ready with another match but, curiously enough, Father Bear did not repeat his attack.

‘Can you light many of those little blue roses?’ asked Father Bear.

‘I can light enough to put an end to the whole forest,’ replied the boy, for he thought that in this way he might be able to scare Father Bear.

‘Perhaps you could set fire to house and grounds too?’ said Father Bear.

‘Oh, that would be no trick for me!’ boasted Nils, hoping that this would make the bear respect him.

‘Good!’ exclaimed the bear. ‘You shall render me a service. Now I’m very glad that I did not eat you!’

Father Bear carefully took the boy between his teeth and climbed up from the pit. He did this with remarkable ease and agility, considering that he was so big and

heavy. As soon as he was up he speedily made for the woods. It was evident that Father Bear was created to squeeze through dense forests. The heavy body pushed through the brushwood as a boat does through water.

Father Bear ran along till he came to a hill at the outskirts of the forest, where he could see the big ironworks. Here he lay down and placed the boy in front of him, holding him securely between his forepaws.

‘Now look down at that big noise-shop!’ he commanded. The great ironworks, with many tall buildings, stood at the edge of a waterfall. High chimneys sent forth dark clouds of smoke, blast furnaces were in full blaze, and light shone from all the windows and doors. Within, hammers and rolling-mills were going with such force that the air rang with their clatter and boom. All around the workshops proper were immense coal-sheds, great slag heaps, warehouses, wood piles, and tool-sheds. Just beyond were long rows of working-men’s homes, pretty houses, schools, assembly halls, and shops. But there all was quiet and apparently everybody was asleep. Nils did not glance in that direction, but gazed intently at the ironworks. The earth around them was black; the sky above them was like a great dark blue dome; the rapids, white with foam, rushed by, while the buildings themselves were sending out light and smoke, fire and sparks. It was the grandest sight the boy had ever seen.

‘Surely you don’t mean to say you can set fire to a place like that?’ remarked the bear doubtfully.

The boy stood wedged between the beast’s paws thinking the only thing that might save him would be that the bear should have a high opinion of his capacity and power.

‘It’s all the same to me,’ he answered with a superior air. ‘Big or little, I can burn it down.’

‘Then I’ll tell you something,’ said Father Bear. ‘My forefathers lived in this region from the time that the forests first sprang up. From them I inherited hunting-grounds and pastures, lairs and retreats, and have lived here in peace all my life. In the beginning I wasn’t troubled much by the human kind. They dug in the mountains and picked up a little ore, and down here, by the rapids, they had a forge and a furnace; but the hammers sounded only a few hours during the day, and the furnace was not fired more than two moons at a stretch. It wasn’t so bad but that I could stand it; but these last years, since they have built this noise-shop, which keeps up the same racket both day and night, life here has become intolerable. Formerly only a manager and a couple of blacksmiths lived here, but now there are so many people that I can never feel safe from them. I thought that I should have to move away, but I have discovered something better!’

The boy wondered what Father Bear had hit upon, but no opportunity was afforded him to ask, as the bear took him between his teeth again and lumbered down the hill. The boy could see nothing, but knew by the increasing noise that they were approaching the rolling-mills.

Father Bear was well informed regarding the iron-works. He had prowled around there on many a dark night, had observed what went on within, and had wondered if there would never be any cessation of the work. He had tested the walls with his paws and wished that he were only strong enough to knock down the whole structure with a single blow.

He was not easily distinguishable against the dark

ground, and when, in addition, he remained in the shadow of the walls there was not much danger of his being discovered. Now he walked fearlessly between the workshops and climbed to the top of a slag heap.



There he sat up on his haunches, took the boy between his forepaws, and held him up and let him look into the ironworks, at the furnace and the forge, and he became more and more astonished as he saw how the blacksmiths handled iron and fire.

'Those men have no fear of heat and flames,' he thought. The workmen were sooty and grimy. He fancied they were some sort of firefolk—that was why they could bend and mould the iron as they wished. He could not believe that they were just ordinary men, since they had such power.

'They keep this up day after day, night after night,' said Father Bear, as he dropped wearily down on the ground. 'You can understand that one gets rather tired of that kind of thing. I'm glad

that at last I can put an end to it!'

'Indeed!' said the boy. 'How will you go about it?'

'Oh, I thought that you were going to set fire to the buildings,' said Father Bear. 'That would put an end to all this work, and I could remain in my old home.'

Nils turned cold as ice all over his body.

So it was for this that Father Bear had brought him here!

‘If you will set fire to the noise-works I’ll promise to spare your life,’ said Father Bear. ‘But if you don’t do it I’ll make short work of you!'

The huge workshops were built of brick, and the boy was thinking to himself that Father Bear could command as much as he liked, it was impossible to obey him. Presently he saw that it might not be impossible after all. Just beyond them lay a pile of chips and shavings to which he could easily set fire, and beside it was a wood pile that almost reached the coal-shed. The coal-shed extended over to the workshops, and if that once caught fire, the flames would soon fly over to the roof of the iron foundry. Everything combustible would burn, the walls would fall from the heat, and the machinery would be destroyed.

‘Will you or won’t you?’ demanded Father Bear.

The boy knew that he ought to answer promptly that he would not, but he also knew that then the bear’s paws would squeeze him to death; therefore he replied:

‘I shall have to think it over.’

‘I can wait for you a little longer,’ said Father Bear. ‘But after that you’ll get no more grace. You must know that it’s the fault of the iron that the human kind can live here on the property of the bears. And now you understand why I want to be rid of the works.’

Nils meant to use the respite to think out some way to save himself but, anxious and distraught as he was, his thoughts wandered. He began thinking of all that he had seen when he flew over the mining districts. It was strange that there should be so much life and activity and so much work back there in the wilderness.

‘Just think how poor and desolate this place would be had there been no iron here!

‘This very foundry gave employment to many, and had gathered around it many homes filled with people who, in turn, had attracted hither railways and telegraph wires and—’

‘Come, come!’ growled the bear. ‘Will you or won’t you?’

The boy swept his hand across his forehead. No plan of escape had as yet come to his mind, but this much he knew—he did not wish to do any harm to the iron, which was so useful to rich and poor alike, and which gave bread to so many people in this land.

‘I won’t!’ he said.

Father Bear squeezed him a little harder, but said nothing.

‘You’ll not get me to destroy the ironworks!’ defied the boy. ‘The iron is so great a blessing that it will never do to harm it.’

‘Then of course you don’t expect to be allowed to live very long?’ said the bear.

‘No, I don’t expect it,’ returned Nils, looking the bear straight in the eye.

Father Bear gripped him still harder. It hurt so that the boy could not keep the tears back, but he did not cry out or say a word.

‘Very well, then,’ said Father Bear, raising his paw very slowly, hoping that the boy would give in at the last moment.

But just then Nils heard something click very close to them, and saw the muzzle of a rifle two paces away. Both he and Father Bear had been so engrossed in their own affairs they had not observed that a man had stolen right upon them.

‘Father Bear. Don’t you hear the clicking of a trigger?’ cried the boy. ‘Run, or you’ll be shot!’

Father Bear at once made off. However, he allowed himself time enough to pick up the boy and carry him along. As he ran, a couple of shots sounded and the bullets grazed his ears, but luckily he escaped.

Nils thought, as he was dangling from the bear’s mouth, that never had he been so stupid as he was to-night. If he had only kept still the bear would have been shot, and he himself would have been freed. But he had become so accustomed to helping the animals that he did it naturally and as a matter of course.

When Father Bear had run some distance into the woods, he paused and set the boy down on the ground.

‘Thank you, little one!’ he said. ‘I dare say those bullets would have caught me if you hadn’t been there. And now I want to do you a service in return. If you should ever meet with another bear, just say to him this—which I shall whisper to you—and he won’t touch you.’

Father Bear whispered a word or two into the boy’s ear and hurried away, for he thought he heard hounds and hunters pursuing him.

Nils stood in the forest, free and unharmed, and could hardly understand how it was possible.

The wild geese had been flying back and forth the whole evening, peering and calling, but they had been unable to find Tummetott. They searched long after the sun had set, and, finally, when it had grown so dark that they were forced to alight somewhere for the night, they were very down-hearted. There was not one among them but thought the boy had been killed by the fall, and was lying dead in the forest where they could not see him.

But the next morning, when the sun peeped over the hills and awakened the wild geese, Nils lay sleeping, as usual, in their midst. When he woke and heard them shrieking and cackling their astonishment, he could not help laughing.

They were so eager to know what had happened to him that they did not want to feed until he had told them the whole story. The boy soon narrated his entire adventure with the bears, but after that he seemed reluctant to continue.

‘How I got back to you perhaps you already know?’ he said.

‘No, we know nothing. We thought you were killed.’

‘That’s curious!’ remarked the boy. ‘Oh, yes—when Father Bear left me I climbed up into a pine and fell asleep. At daybreak I was awakened by an eagle hovering over me. He picked me up with his talons and carried me away. He didn’t hurt me, but flew straight here to you and dropped me down among you.’

‘Didn’t he tell you who he was?’ asked the big white gander.

‘He was gone before I had time even to thank him. I thought that Mother Akka had sent him after me.’

‘How extraordinary!’ exclaimed the white gander. ‘But are you certain that it was an eagle?’

‘I had never before seen an eagle,’ said the boy, ‘but he was so big and splendid that I can’t give him a lowlier name!’

The Morten Gander turned to the wild geese to hear what they thought of this; but they stood gazing into the air, as though they were thinking of something else.

‘We must not entirely forget to have breakfast to-day,’ said Akka, quickly spreading her wings.



PART FIVE

THE FLOOD

THE SWANS

THERE was a terrible storm raging in the district north of Lake Mälar which lasted several days. The sky was a dull grey, the wind whistled, and the rain beat. Both people and animals knew the spring could not be ushered in with anything short of this; nevertheless they thought it unbearable.

After it had been raining for a whole day the snow-drifts in the pine forests began to melt in earnest, and the spring brooks grew lively. All the pools on the roads, the standing water in the ditches, the water that oozed between the tufts in marshes and swamps—all were in motion and tried to find their way to brooks that they might be borne along to the sea.

The brooks rushed as fast as possible down to the rivers, and the rivers did their utmost to carry the water to Lake Mälar.

But then all the lakes and rivers in Uppland and the mining district threw off their ice covers on one and the same day, so that the rivers filled with ice-floes, and quickly rose clear up to their banks.

Swollen as they were they plunged into Lake Mälar, and it was not long before the lake had taken in as much water as it could well hold. Down by the outlet was a raging torrent. Norrström is a narrow channel, and it could not let out the water quickly enough. Besides, there was a strong easterly wind that lashed against the land, obstructing the stream when it tried to carry the fresh water into the Baltic. Since the rivers kept running to Lake Mälar with more water than it could dispose of there was nothing for the big lake to do but overflow its banks.

It rose very slowly, as if reluctant to injure its beautiful shores ; but as they were mostly low and gradually sloping, it was not long before the water had flooded several acres of land, and that was enough to create the greatest alarm.

At that critical time Smirre Fox happened to come sneaking through a birch grove just north of Lake Mälar. As usual, he was thinking of Tummetott and the wild geese, and wondering how he should ever find them again. He had lost all track of them.

As he stole cautiously along, more discouraged than usual, he caught sight of Agar the carrier-pigeon, who had perched herself on a birch branch.

‘Goodness, I’m in luck to run across you, Agar !’ exclaimed Smirre. ‘Maybe you can tell me where Akka from Kebnekaise and her flock are nowadays?’

‘It’s quite possible that I know where they are,’ Agar hinted, ‘but I’m not likely to tell you !’

‘Please yourself,’ retorted Smirre. ‘Nevertheless, you can take a message that I have for them. You probably know the present condition of Lake Mälar? There’s a great overflow down there and all the swans who live in Hjälsta Bay are in danger of seeing their nests, with

all their eggs, destroyed. Daylight, the swan-king, has heard of the midget who travels with the wild geese and knows a remedy for every ill. He has sent me to ask Akka if she will bring Tummetott down to Hjälsta Bay.'

'I dare say I can convey your message,' Agar replied, 'but I can't understand how the little boy will be able to help the swans.'

'Nor do I,' said Smirre, 'but he can do almost everything, it seems.'

'It's surprising to me that Daylight should send his messages by a fox,' Agar remarked.

'Well, we're not exactly what you'd call good friends,' said Smirre smoothly, 'but in an emergency like this we must help each other. Perhaps it would be just as well not to tell Akka that you got the message from a fox. Between you and me, she's inclined to be a little suspicious.'

The safest refuge for water-fowl in the whole Mälar district is Hjälsta Bay. It has low shores, shallow water, and is also covered with reeds. It is a good retreat for birds, since it has long been forbidden territory to hunters.

It is the home of a great many swans, and the owner of the old castle near by had prohibited all shooting on the bay, so that they might be unmolested.

As soon as Akka received word that the swans needed her help she hastened down to Hjälsta Bay. She arrived with her flock one evening and saw at a glance that there had been a great disaster. The big swans' nests had been torn away, and the strong wind was driving them down the bay. Some had already fallen apart, two or three had capsized, and the eggs lay at the bottom of the lake.

When Akka alighted on the bay, all the swans living

there were gathered near the eastern shore, where they were protected from the wind.

Although they had suffered much by the flood they were too proud to let any one see it.

‘It is useless to cry,’ they said. ‘There are plenty of root-fibres and stems here; we can soon build new nests.’

None had thought of asking a stranger to help them, and the swans had no idea that Smirre Fox had sent for the wild geese.

There were several hundred swans resting on the water. They had placed themselves according to rank and station. The young and inexperienced were farthest out, the old and wise nearer the middle of the group, and right in the centre sat Daylight the swan-king and Snow-White the swan-queen, who were older than any of the others and regarded the rest of the swans as their children.

The geese alighted on the west shore of the bay; but when Akka saw where the swans were she swam toward them at once. She was very much surprised at their having sent for her, but she regarded it as an honour and did not wish to lose a moment in coming to their aid.

As Akka approached the swans she paused to see if the geese who followed her swam in a straight line, and at even distances apart.

‘Now swim along quickly!’ she ordered. ‘Don’t stare at the swans as if you had never before seen anything beautiful, and don’t mind what they may say to you!’

This was not the first time that Akka had called on the aristocratic swans. They had always received her in a manner befitting a great traveller like herself.

But still she did not like the idea of swimming in among them. She never felt so grey and insignificant as when she happened upon swans. One or another of

them was sure to drop a remark about 'common grey-feathers' and 'poor folk.' But it is always best to take no notice of such things.

This time everything passed off uncommonly well. The swans politely made way for the wild geese, who swam forward through a kind of passageway, bordered by shimmering white birds.

It was a beautiful sight to watch them as they spread their wings, like sails, to look their best before the strangers. They refrained from making comments, which rather surprised Akka.

Evidently Daylight had noted their misbehaviour in the past and had told the swans that they must conduct themselves in a proper manner—so thought the leader-goose.

But just as the swans were making an effort to observe the rules of etiquette, they caught sight of the white gander, who swam last in the long goose-line. Then there was a murmur of surprise and disapproval among the swans, and at once there was an end to their good behaviour.

'What's this?' shrieked one. 'Do the wild geese intend to dress up in white feathers?'

'They needn't think that will make swans of them,' cried another.

They began shrieking—one louder than another—in their strong, resonant voices. It was impossible to explain that a tame gander had come with the wild geese.

'That must be the goose-king himself coming along,' they said tauntingly. 'There's no limit to their audacity!'

'That's no goose, it's only a tame duck.'

The big white gander remembered Akka's admonition to pay no attention, no matter what he might hear. He kept quiet and swam ahead as fast as he could,

but it did no good. The swans became more and more impudent.

‘What’s that frog he carries on his back?’ asked one. ‘They must think we don’t see it’s a frog because it is dressed like a human being.’

The swans, who but a moment before had been resting in such perfect order, now swam up and down excitedly. All tried to crowd forward to get a glimpse of the white wild goose.

‘That white gander ought to be ashamed to come here and parade before swans!’

‘He’s probably as grey as the rest of them. He has only been in a flour barrel at some farmhouse!’

Akka had just come up to Daylight and was about to ask him what kind of help he wanted of her, when the swan-king noticed the uproar among the swans.

‘What do I see? Haven’t I taught you to be polite to strangers?’ he said with a frown.

Snow-White, the swan-queen, swam out to restore order among her subjects, and again Daylight turned to Akka.

Presently Snow-White came back, appearing greatly agitated.

‘Can’t you keep them quiet?’ shouted Daylight.

‘There’s a white wild gander over there,’ answered Snow-white. ‘Is it not shameful? I don’t wonder they are furious!’

‘A white wild gander?’ scoffed Daylight. ‘That’s too ridiculous! There can’t be such a thing. You must be mistaken.’

The crowds around Morten Gander grew larger and larger. Akka and the other wild geese tried to swim over to him, but were jostled hither and thither and could not get to him.

The old swan-king, who was the strongest among them.

swam off quickly, pushed all the others aside, and made his way over to the big white gander. But when he saw that there really was a white goose on the water, he was just as indignant as the rest.

He hissed with rage, flew straight at Morten Gander, and tore out a few feathers.

‘I’ll teach you a lesson, wild goose,’ he shrieked, ‘so that you’ll not come again to the swans dressed up in this way!’

‘Fly, Morten Gander! Fly, fly!’ cried Akka, for she knew that otherwise the swans would pull out every feather the gander had.

‘Fly, fly!’ screamed Tummetott, too.

But the gander was so hedged in by the swans that he had not room enough to spread his wings. All around him the swans stretched their long necks and opened their strong bills to pluck his feathers.

Morten Gander defended himself as best he could, by striking and biting. The wild geese also began to fight the swans.

It was obvious how this would have ended had the geese not received help quite unexpectedly.

A red-tail noticed that they were being roughly treated by the swans. Instantly he cried out the shrill call that little birds use when they need help to drive off a hawk or a falcon.

Three calls had barely sounded when all the little birds in the vicinity came shooting down to Hjälsta Bay, as if on wings of lightning.

These delicate little creatures swooped down upon the swans, screeched in their ears, and obstructed their view with the flutter of their tiny wings. They made them dizzy with their fluttering and drove them to distraction with their cries of ‘Shame, shame, swans!’

The attack of the small birds lasted but a moment. When they were gone and the swans came to their senses, they saw that the geese had risen and flown over to the other end of the bay.

THE NEW WATCH-DOG

There was this at least to be said in the swans' favour —when they saw that the wild geese had escaped they were too proud to chase them. Therefore the geese could stand in peace on a clump of reeds and sleep.

Nils was too hungry to sleep.

'I must have something to eat,' he said.

At that time, when all kinds of things were floating on the water, it was not difficult for a little boy like Nils to find a craft. He did not stop to think, but hopped down on to a stump that had drifted in amongst the reeds. Then he picked up a little stick and began to paddle toward the shore.

Just as he was landing he heard a splash in the water. He stopped short. First he saw a mother swan asleep in her big nest quite close to him, then he noticed that a fox had taken a few steps into the water and was sneaking up to the swan's nest.

'Hi, hi, hi! Get up, get up!' cried the boy, beating the water with his stick.

The mother swan rose, but not so quickly but that the fox could have pounced upon her had he cared to. However, he refrained and instead hurried straight toward the boy.

Nils saw the fox coming and ran for his life.

Wide stretches of meadow land spread before him. He saw no tree that he could climb, no hole where he might hide; he just had to keep running.

The boy was a good runner, but it stands to reason that he could not race with a fox.

Not far from the bay there were a number of little cottages, with light shining through the windows. Naturally the boy ran in that direction, but he realized that long before he could reach the nearest cottage the fox would catch up to him.

Once the fox was so close that it looked as if the boy would surely be his prey, but Nils quickly sprang aside and turned back toward the bay. By that move the fox lost time, and before he could reach the boy the latter had run up to two men who had spent the whole day on the lake salvaging flotsam and were on their way home.

The men were tired and sleepy; they had noticed neither boy nor fox, although both had been running right in front of them. Nor did the boy ask help of the men; he was content to walk close beside them.

‘Surely the fox won’t venture to come up to the men,’ he thought.

But presently the fox came patterning along. He probably counted on the men taking him for a dog, for he went straight up to them.

‘Whose dog can that be sneaking around here?’ queried one. ‘He looks as though he were ready to bite.’

The other paused and glanced back.

‘Go along with you!’ he said, and gave the fox a kick that sent it to the opposite side of the road. ‘What are you doing here?’

After that the fox kept at a safe distance, but followed all the while.

Presently the men reached a cottage and entered it. Nils intended to go in with them, but when he got to the veranda he saw a big, shaggy watch-dog rush out

from his kennel to greet his master. Suddenly the boy changed his mind and remained out in the open.

‘Listen, watch-dog!’ he whispered as soon as the men had shut the door. ‘I wonder if you would like to help me catch a fox to-night?’

The dog had poor eyesight and had become irritable and cranky from being chained.

‘What, I catch a fox?’ he barked angrily. ‘Who are you that makes fun of me? You just come within my reach and I’ll teach you not to fool with me!’

‘You needn’t think that I’m afraid to come near you!’ said Nils, running up to him.

When the dog saw him he was so astonished that he could not speak.

‘I’m the one they call Tummetott, who travels with the wild geese,’ said the boy. ‘Haven’t you heard of me?’

‘I believe the sparrows have twittered a little about you,’ the dog returned. ‘They say that you have done wonderful things for one of your size.’

‘I’ve been rather lucky up to the present,’ admitted the boy. ‘But now it’s all up with me unless you help me. There’s a fox at my heels. He’s lying in wait for me around the corner.’

‘Yes, indeed, I can smell him,’ said the dog. ‘But we’ll soon be rid of him!’ With that the dog sprang as far as the chain would allow, barking and growling ever so long. ‘Now I don’t think he will show his face again to-night,’ he said.

‘It will take something besides a fine bark to scare that fox,’ the boy remarked. ‘He’ll soon be here again, and that is precisely what I wish, for I have set my heart on your catching him.’

‘Are you poking fun at me now?’ asked the dog.

‘Only come with me into your kennel and I’ll tell you what to do.’

The boy and the watch-dog crept into the kennel and crouched there, whispering.

By and by the fox stuck his nose out from his hiding-place. When all was quiet he crept along cautiously. He scented the boy all the way to the kennel, but halted at a safe distance and sat down to think of some way to coax him out.

Suddenly the watch-dog poked his head out and growled at him:

‘Go away, or I’ll catch you!’

‘I’ll sit here as long as I please,’ defied the fox.

‘Go away!’ repeated the dog threateningly, ‘or there will be no more hunting for you after to-night.’

But the fox only grinned and did not move an inch.

‘I know how far your chain can reach,’ he said.

‘I have warned you twice,’ said the dog, coming out from his kennel. ‘Now blame yourself!’

With that the dog sprang at the fox and caught him without the least effort, for he was loose; Nils had unbuckled his collar.

There was a hot struggle, but it was soon over. The dog was the victor. The fox lay on the ground and dared not move.

‘Don’t stir or I’ll kill you!’ snarled the dog. Then he took the fox by the scruff of the neck and dragged him to the kennel. There the boy was ready with the chain. He placed the dog-collar around the neck of the fox, tightening it so that he was securely chained. During all this the fox had to lie still, for he was afraid to move.

‘Now, Smirre Fox, I hope you’ll make a good watch-dog,’ laughed Nils when he had finished.

PART SIX

DUNFIN

THE CITY THAT FLOATS ON THE WATER

No one could be more gentle and kind than the little grey goose Dunfin. All the wild geese loved her, and the tame white gander would have died for her. When Dunfin asked for anything not even Akka could say no.

As soon as Dunfin came to Lake Mälar the landscape looked familiar to her. Just beyond the lake lay the sea, with many wooded islands, and there, on a little islet, lived her parents and her brothers and sisters. She begged the wild geese to fly to her home before travelling farther north, that she might let her family see that she was still alive. It would be such a joy to them.

Akka frankly declared that she thought Dunfin's parents and brothers and sisters had shown no great love for her when they abandoned her at Öland, but Dunfin would not admit that Akka was in the right. 'What else was there to do, when they saw that I could not fly?' she protested. 'Surely they couldn't remain at Öland on my account!'

Dunfin began telling the wild geese all about her home in the archipelago to try to induce them to make the trip. Her family lived on a rock island. Seen from a distance, there appeared to be nothing but stone there, but when one came closer there were to be found the choicest goose titbits in clefts and hollows, and one might search long for better nesting places than those that were hidden in the mountain crevices or among

the willows. But the best of all was the old fisherman who lived there. Dunfin had heard that in his youth he had been a great shot and had always lain among the seaweed skerries and hunted birds. But now, in his old age—since his wife had died and the children had gone from home, so that he was alone in the hut—he had begun to care for the birds on his island. He never fired a shot at them, nor would he permit others to do so. He walked around amongst the birds' nests, and when the mother birds were sitting he brought them food. Not one was afraid of him. They all loved him.

Dunfin had been in his hut many times, and he had fed her with bread crumbs. Because he was kind to the birds they flocked to his island in such great numbers that it was becoming overcrowded. If one happened to arrive a little late in the spring, all the nesting-places were occupied. That was why Dunfin's family had been obliged to leave her.

Dunfin begged so hard that she finally had her way, although the wild geese felt that they were losing time and really should be going straight north. But a little trip like this to the cliff island would not delay them more than a day.

So they started off one morning, after fortifying themselves with a good breakfast, and flew eastward over Lake Mälar. Nils did not know for certain where they were going, but he noticed that the farther east they flew the busier it was on the lake and the more built up were the shores.

Heavily freighted barges and sloops, boats and fishing-smacks were on their way east, and these were met and passed by many pretty white steamers. Along the shores ran country roads and railway tracks—all in the same



The farther cast they flew . . . the more built up were the shores

direction. There was some place beyond in the east where all wished to go to in the morning.

On one of the islands the boy saw a big white castle, and to the east of it the shores were dotted with houses. At the start these lay far apart, then they became closer and closer, and presently the whole shore was lined with them. They were of every variety—here a castle, there a cottage; then a low manor house appeared, or a mansion, with many small towers. Some stood in gardens, but most of them were in the leafy woods which bordered the shores. Despite their differences, they had one point of resemblance—they were not plain and dull looking, like other buildings, but were brightly painted in striking greens and blues, reds and whites, like children's playhouses.

As Nils sat on the gander's back and glanced down at the curious shore houses, Dunfin cried out with delight: 'Now I know where I am! Over there lies the City that Floats on the Water.'

The boy looked ahead. At first he saw nothing but some light clouds and mists rolling forward over the water, but soon he caught sight of some tall spires, and then one and another house with many rows of windows. They appeared and disappeared—rolling hither and thither—but not a strip of shore did he see! Everything over there appeared to be resting on the water.

Nearer to the city he saw no more pretty playhouses along the shores—only dingy factories. Great heaps of coal and wood were stacked behind tall hoardings, and alongside black, sooty docks lay bulky cargo steamers; but over all was spread a shimmering, transparent mist, which made everything appear so big and powerful and strange that it was almost beautiful.

Nils knew that he was riding above a large city, for

he saw spires and house roofs rising from the clouds in every direction. Sometimes an opening was made in the circling mists, and he looked down into a running, turbulent stream; but no land could he see. All this was beautiful to look upon, but he felt quite distraught—as one does when happening upon something one cannot understand.

When he had gone beyond the city, he found that the ground was no longer hidden by clouds, but that shores, streams, and islands were again plainly visible. He turned to see the city better, but could not, for now it looked quite enchanted. The mists had taken on colour from the sunshine and were rolling forward in the most brilliant reds, blues, and yellows. The houses were white, as if built of light, and the windows and spires sparkled like fire. All things floated on the water as before.

The geese were travelling due east. They flew over factories and workshops; then over houses edging the shores. Steamboats and tugs swarmed on the water; but now they came from the east and were steaming westward toward the city.

The wild geese flew on, but instead of the narrow Mälar bays and the little islands, broader waters and larger islands spread under them. At last the mainland was left behind and seen no more.

They flew still farther out, where they found no more large inhabited islands—only numberless little rock islands were scattered on the water. Now the bays were not squeezed together by the land. The sea lay before them, vast and limitless.

Here the wild geese alighted on a cliff island, and as soon as their feet touched the ground Nils turned to Dunfin.

‘What city did we fly over just now?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know what human beings have named it,’ said Dunfin. ‘We grey geese call it the “City that Floats on the Water.”’

THE SISTERS

Dunfin had two sisters, Prettywing and Goldeye. They were strong and intelligent birds, but they did not have such a soft and shiny feather dress as Dunfin, nor did they have her sweet and gentle disposition. From the time they had been little yellow goslings their parents and relatives and even the old fisherman had plainly shown them that they thought more of Dunfin than of them. Therefore the sisters had always hated her.

When the wild geese landed on the cliff island, Prettywing and Goldeye were feeding on a bit of grass close to the strand, and immediately caught sight of the strangers.

‘See, Sister Goldeye, what fine-looking geese have come to our island!’ exclaimed Prettywing. ‘I have rarely seen such graceful birds. Do you notice that they have a white gander among them? Did you ever set eyes on a handsomer bird? One could almost take him for a swan!’

Goldeye agreed with her sister that these were certainly very distinguished strangers that had come to the island, but suddenly she broke off and called: ‘Sister Prettywing! Oh, Sister Prettywing! Don’t you see whom they bring with them?’

Prettywing also caught sight of Dunfin and was so astounded that she stood for a long time with her bill wide open, and only hissed.

‘It can’t be possible that it is she! How did she

manage to get in with people of that kind? Why, we left her at Öland to starve to death.'

'The worst of it is she will tattle to father and mother that we flew so close to her that we knocked her wing out of joint,' said Goldeye. 'You'll see that it will end in our being driven from the island!'

'We have nothing but trouble in store for us now that that spoilt youngster has come back,' snapped Prettywing. 'Still I think it would be best for us to appear as pleased as possible over her return. She is so stupid that perhaps she didn't even notice that we gave her a push on purpose.'

While Prettywing and Goldeye were talking in this strain, the wild geese had been standing on the strand, preening their feathers after the flight. Now they marched in a long line up the rocky shore to the cleft where Dunfin's parents usually stopped.

Dunfin's parents were good folk. They had lived on the island longer than any one else, and it was their habit to counsel and aid all newcomers. They too had seen the geese approach, but they had not recognized Dunfin in the flock.

'It is strange to see wild geese land on this island,' remarked the goose-chief. 'It is a fine flock—that one can see by their flight.'

'We are not so crowded yet that we can't receive them,' said the goose-wife, who was gentle and sweet-tempered, like Dunfin.

When Akka came marching with her company, Dunfin's parents went out to meet her and welcome her to the island. Dunfin flew from her place at the end of the line and alighted between her parents.

'Mother and father, I'm here at last!' she cried joyously. 'Don't you know Dunfin?'

At first the old goose-parents could not quite make out what they saw, but when they recognized Dunfin they were absurdly happy, of course.

While the wild geese and Morten Gander and Dunfin were chattering excitedly, trying to tell how she had been rescued, Prettywing and Goldeye came running. They cried 'Welcome,' and pretended to be so happy because Dunfin was at home that she was deeply moved.

The wild geese fared well on the island and decided not to travel farther until the following morning. After a while the sisters asked Dunfin if she would come with them and see the places where they intended to build their nests. She promptly accompanied them, and saw that they had picked out secluded and well-protected nesting-places.

'Now where will you settle down, Dunfin?' they asked.

'I? Why, I don't intend to remain on the island,' she said. 'I'm going with the wild geese up to Lapland.'

'What a pity that you must leave us,' said the sisters.

'I should have been very glad to remain here with father and mother and you,' said Dunfin, 'had I not promised the big, white—'

'What!' shrieked Prettywing. 'Are you to have the handsome gander? Then it is—' But here Goldeye gave her a sharp nudge, and she stopped short.

The two cruel sisters had much to talk about all the afternoon. They were furious because Dunfin had a suitor like the white gander. They themselves had suitors, but theirs were only common grey geese and, since they had seen Morten Gander, they thought them so homely and low-bred that they did not wish even to look at them.

'This will grieve me to death,' whimpered Goldeye.

'If at least it had been you, Sister Prettywing, who had captured him!'

'I would rather see him dead than go about here the entire summer thinking of Dunfin capturing a white gander!' pouted Prettywing.

However, the sisters continued to appear very friendly toward Dunfin, and in the afternoon Goldeye took Dunfin with her that she might see the one she thought of marrying.

'He's not as attractive as the one you will have,' said Goldeye. 'But to make up for it, one can be certain that he is what he is.'

'What do you mean, Goldeye?' questioned Dunfin. At first Goldeye would not explain what she had meant, but at last she came out with it.

'We have never seen a white goose travel with wild geese,' said the sister, 'and we wonder if he can be bewitched.'

'You are very stupid,' retorted Dunfin indignantly. 'He is a tame gander, of course.'

'He brings with him one who *is* bewitched,' said Goldeye, 'and, under the circumstances, he too must be bewitched. Are you not afraid that he may be a black cormorant?' She was a good talker and succeeded in frightening Dunfin thoroughly.

'You don't mean what you are saying,' pleaded the little grey goose. 'You only wish to frighten me.'

'I wish what is for your good, Dunfin,' said Goldeye. 'I can't imagine anything worse than for you to fly away with a black cormorant! But now I shall tell you something—try to persuade him to eat some of the roots I have gathered here. If he is bewitched, it will be apparent at once. If he is not, he will remain as he is.'

• • • • •

The boy was sitting amongst the wild geese, listening to Akka and the old goose-chief, when Dunfin came flying up to him. ‘Tummetott, Tummetott!’ she cried. ‘Morten Gander is dying! I have killed him!’

‘Let me get up on your back, Dunfin, and take me to him!’ cried Nils. Away they flew, and Akka and the other wild geese followed them. When they got to the gander he was lying prostrate on the ground. He could not utter a word—only gasped for breath.

‘Tickle him under the throat and slap him on the back!’ commanded Akka. The boy did so and presently the big, white gander coughed up a large white root, which had stuck in his throat. ‘Have you been eating these?’ asked Akka, pointing to some roots that lay on the ground.

‘Yes,’ groaned the gander.

‘Then it was well they stuck in your throat,’ said Akka, ‘for they are poisonous. Had you swallowed them you certainly would have died.’

‘Dunfin bade me eat them,’ said the gander.

‘My sister gave them to me!’ exclaimed Dunfin, and she told everything.

‘You must beware of those sisters of yours, Dunfin!’ warned Akka, ‘for they wish you no good, depend upon it!’

But Dunfin had such a gentle disposition that she could not think evil of any one and, a moment later, when Prettywing asked her to come and meet her intended, she went with her immediately.

‘Oh, he isn’t as handsome as yours,’ said the sister, ‘but he’s much more courageous and daring.’

‘How do you know he is?’ said Dunfin.

‘For some time past there has been weeping and wailing amongst the sea-gulls and wild ducks on the

island. Every morning at daybreak a strange bird of prey comes and carries off one of them.'

'What kind of a bird is it?' asked Dunfin.

'We don't know,' replied the sister. 'One of his kind has never before been seen on the island, and, strange to say, he has never attacked one of us geese. But now my intended has made up his mind to drive him away.'

'I hope he'll succeed,' said Dunfin.

'I hardly think he will,' returned the sister. 'If my gander were as big and strong as yours I should have more hope.'

'Do you wish me to ask my gander to meet the strange bird?' asked Dunfin.

'Indeed I do!' exclaimed Prettywing. 'You couldn't render me a greater service.'

The next morning the gander was up before the sun. He stationed himself on the highest point of the island and peered in all directions. Presently he saw a big dark bird coming from the west. His wings were exceedingly large, and it was easy to tell that he was an eagle. The gander had not expected a more dangerous adversary than an owl, and now he understood that he could not escape this encounter with his life. But it did not occur to him to avoid a struggle with a bird who was many times stronger than himself.

The great bird swooped down on a sea-gull and dug his talons into it. Before the eagle could spread his wings Morten Gander rushed up to him. 'Drop that!' he shouted, 'and don't come here again or you'll have me to deal with!'

'What kind of a lunatic are you?' said the eagle. 'It's lucky for you that I never fight with geese, or you would soon be done for!'

Morten Gander thought the eagle considered himself

too good to fight with him and flew at him angrily, biting him on the throat and beating him with his wings. This, naturally, the eagle would not tolerate and he began to fight, but not with his full strength.

Nils lay sleeping in the quarters where Akka and the other wild geese slept, when Dunfin called: 'Tummetott, Tummetott! Morten Gander is being torn to pieces by an eagle.'

'Let me get up on your back, Dunfin, and take me to him!' said the boy.

When they arrived on the scene Morten Gander was badly torn and bleeding, but he was still fighting. The boy could not battle with the eagle, all that he could do was to seek more efficient help.

'Hurry, Dunfin, and call Akka and the wild geese!' he cried. The instant he said that, the eagle stopped fighting.

'Who's speaking of Akka?' he asked. And when he saw Tummetott and heard the wild geese honking, he spread his wings.

'Tell Akka I never expected to run across her or any of her flock out here by the sea!' he said, and soared away in a rapid and graceful flight.

'That is the same eagle who once brought me back to the wild geese,' said the boy, gazing after the bird in astonishment.

The geese had decided to leave the island at dawn, but first they wanted to feed a while. As they walked about and nibbled, a mountain duck came up to Dunfin.

'I have a message for you from your sisters,' said the duck. 'They dare not show themselves among the wild geese, but they asked me to remind you not to leave the island without calling on the old fisherman.'

'That's true!' exclaimed Dunfin. But she was so

frightened now that she would not go alone, so she asked the gander and Tummetott to accompany her to the hut.

The door was open, so Dunfin entered, but the others remained outside. After a moment they heard Akka give the signal to start, and called Dunfin. A grey goose came out and flew with the wild geese away from the island.

They had travelled quite a distance along the archipelago when the boy began to wonder about the goose who accompanied them. Dunfin always flew lightly and noiselessly, but this one laboured with heavy and noisy wing-strokes. 'Akka, turn back! Akka, turn back,' he called out quickly. 'We are in the wrong company. It is Prettywing that follows us!'

The boy had barely spoken when the goose uttered such an ugly and angry shriek that all knew who she was. Akka and the others turned to her, but the grey goose did not fly away at once. Instead she bumped against the big gander, snatched Tummetott, and flew off with him in her bill.

There was a wild chase over the archipelago. Prettywing flew fast, but the wild geese were close behind her, and there was no chance for her to escape.

Suddenly they saw a puff of smoke rise up from the sea, and heard an explosion. In their excitement they had not noticed that they were directly above a boat in which a lone fisherman was seated.

However, none of the geese was hurt; but just there, above the boat, Prettywing opened her bill and dropped Tummetott into the sea.



PART SEVEN

STOCKHOLM

A FEW years ago, at Skansen—the great park just outside Stockholm where they have collected so many wonderful things—there lived a little old man, named Clement Larsson. He was from Hälsingland and had come to Skansen with his fiddle to play folk dances and other old melodies. But it was mostly in the evening he played. During the day it was his business to sit on

guard in one of the many pretty peasant cottages which have been moved to Skansen from all parts of the country.

One beautiful evening in the beginning of May Clement had been granted a few hours' leave of absence. He was on his way down the steep hill leading out of Skansen when he met an island fisherman coming along with his game bag. The fisherman was an active young man who used to come to Skansen with sea-fowl that he had managed to capture alive. Clement had met him before, many times.

The fisherman stopped Clement to ask if the superintendent at Skansen was at home. When Clement had replied, he in turn asked what choice thing the fisherman had in his bag. 'You can see what I have,' the fisherman answered, 'if in return you will give me an idea as to what I should ask for it.'

He held open the bag and Clement peeped into it once—and again—then quickly drew back a step or two. 'Good gracious, Åsbjörn!' he exclaimed. 'How did you catch that one?'

He remembered that when he was a child his mother used to talk of the tiny folk who lived under the cottage floor. He was not permitted to cry or to be naughty, lest he provoke these small people. After he was grown he believed his mother had made up these stories about the elves to make him behave himself. But it had been no invention of his mother's, it seemed; for there, in Åsbjörn's bag, lay one of the tiny folk.

There was a little of the terror natural to childhood left in Clement, and he felt a shudder run down his spine as he peeped into the bag. Åsbjörn saw that he was frightened and began to laugh; but Clement took the matter seriously.

‘Tell me, Åsbjörn, where you came across him?’ he asked.

‘You may be sure that I wasn’t lying in wait for him!’ said Åsbjörn. ‘He came to me. I started out early this morning and took my rifle along into the boat. I had just poled away from the shore when I sighted some wild geese coming from the east, shrieking like mad. I sent them a shot, but hit none of them. Instead this creature came tumbling down into the water—so close to the boat that I only had to put my hand out and pick him up.’

‘I hope you didn’t shoot him, Åsbjörn?’

‘Oh, no! He is well and sound; but when he came down he was a little dazed at first, so I took advantage of that fact to wind the ends of two sail threads round his ankles and wrists, so that he couldn’t run away. “Ha! Here’s something for Skansen,” I thought instantly.’

Clement grew strangely troubled as the fisherman talked. All that he had heard about the tiny people in his childhood—of their vindictiveness toward enemies and their benevolence toward friends—came back to him. It had never gone well with those who had attempted to hold one of them captive.

‘You should have let him go at once, Åsbjörn,’ said Clement.

‘I came precious near being forced to set him free,’ returned the fisherman. ‘You may as well know, Clement, that the wild geese followed me all the way home, and they criss-crossed over the island the whole morning, honk-honking as if they wanted him back. Not only they, but the entire population—sea-gulls, sea-swallows, and many others who are not worth a shot of powder, alighted on the island and made an awful

racket. When I came out they fluttered about me until I had to turn back. My wife begged me to let him go, but I had made up my mind that he should come here to Skansen, so I placed one of the children's dolls in the window, hid the midget in the bottom of my bag, and started away. The birds must have believed that it was he who stood in the window, for they permitted me to leave without pursuing me.'

'Does it say anything?' asked Clement.

'Yes. At first he tried to call to the birds, but I wouldn't have it and put a gag in his mouth.'

'Oh, Åsbjörn!' protested Clement. 'How can you treat him so! Don't you see that he is something supernatural!'

'I don't know what he is,' said Åsbjörn calmly. 'Let others consider that. I'm satisfied if only I can get a good sum for him. Now tell me, Clement, what you think the doctor at Skansen would give me.'

There was a long pause before Clement replied. He felt very sorry for the poor little chap. He actually imagined that his mother was standing beside him telling him that he must always be kind to the tiny folk.

'I have no idea what the doctor up there would care to give you, Åsbjörn,' he said finally. 'But if you will leave him with me I'll pay you twenty kronen for him.'

Åsbjörn stared at the fiddler in amazement when he heard him name so large a sum. He thought that Clement believed the midget had some mysterious power and might be of service for him. He was by no means certain that the doctor would think him such a great find or would offer to pay so high a sum for him; so he accepted Clement's proffer.

The fiddler poked his purchase into one of his wide pockets, turned back to Skansen, and went into a

moss-covered hut, where there were neither visitors nor guards. He closed the door after him, took out the midget, who was still bound hand and foot and gagged, and laid him down gently on a bench.

‘Now listen to what I say!’ said Clement. ‘I know of course that such as you do not like to be seen of men, but prefer to go about and busy yourselves in your own way. Therefore I have decided to give you your liberty—but only on condition that you will remain in this park until I permit you to leave. If you agree to this nod your head three times.’

Clement gazed at the midget with confident expectation, but the latter did not move a muscle.

‘You shall not fare badly,’ continued Clement. ‘I’ll see to it that you are fed every day, and you will have so much to do here that the time will not seem long to you. But you mustn’t go elsewhere till I give you leave. Now we’ll agree as to a signal. So long as I set your food out in a white bowl you are to stay. When I set it out in a blue one you may go.’

Clement paused again, expecting the midget to give the sign of approval, but he did not stir.

‘Very well,’ said Clement, ‘then there’s no choice but to show you to the master of this place. Then you’ll be put in a glass case, and all the people in the big city of Stockholm will come and stare at you.’

This scared the midget and he promptly gave the signal.

‘That was right,’ said Clement as he cut the cord that bound the midget’s hands. Then he hurried toward the door.

The boy unloosed the bands around his ankles and tore away the gag before thinking of anything else. When he turned to Clement to thank him, he had gone.

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Just outside the door Clement met a handsome, noble-looking man, who was on his way to a place close by from which there was a beautiful view. Clement could not recall having seen the stately old man before, but the latter must surely have noticed Clement some time when he was playing the fiddle, because he stopped and spoke to him.

‘Good day, Clement!’ he said. ‘How do you do? You are not ill, are you? I think you have grown a bit thin of late.’

There was such an expression of kindness about the old gentleman that Clement plucked up courage and told him of his homesickness.

‘What!’ exclaimed the old gentleman. ‘Are you homesick when you are in Stockholm? It can’t be possible!’ He looked almost offended. Then he reflected that it was only an ignorant old peasant from Hälsingland that he talked with—and so resumed his friendly attitude.

‘Surely you have never heard how the city of Stockholm was founded? If you had, you would understand that your anxiety to get away is only a foolish fancy. Come with me to the bench over there and I will tell you something about Stockholm.’

When the old gentleman was seated on the bench he glanced down at the city, which spread in all its glory below him, and he drew a deep breath, as if he wished to breathe in all the beauty of the landscape. Thereupon he turned to the fiddler.

‘Look, Clement,’ he said, and as he talked he traced with his cane a little map in the sand in front of them.

‘One day a fisherman, who lived on Liding-ö Island, at the seaside, steered his boat toward Lake Mälar, where he had such good luck with his fishing that he

forgot to start for home in time. He got no farther than the four islets, and the best he could do was to land on one and wait until later in the night, when there would be bright moonlight.

‘It was late summer and warm. The fisherman hauled his boat on land, lay down beside it, his head resting upon a stone, and fell asleep. When he awoke the moon had been up a long while. It hung right above him and shone with such splendour that it was like broad daylight.

‘The man jumped to his feet and was about to push his boat into the water, when he saw a lot of black specks moving out in the stream. A school of seals was heading full speed for the island. When the fisherman saw that they intended to crawl up on land, he bent down for his spear, which he always took with him in the boat. But when he straightened up he saw no seals. Instead there stood on the strand the most beautiful young maidens, dressed in green, trailing, satin robes, with pearl crowns upon their heads. The fisherman understood that these were mermaids who lived on desolate rock islands far out at sea and had assumed seal disguises in order to come up on land and enjoy the moonlight on the green islets.

‘He laid down the spear very cautiously, and when the young maidens came up on the island to play he stole behind and surveyed them. He had heard that sea-nymphs were so beautiful and fascinating that no one could see them and not be enchanted by their charms; and he had to admit that this was not too much to say of them.

‘When he had stood for a while and watched the dance under the trees, he went down to the strand, took one of the sealskins lying there, and hid it under a

stone. Then he went back to his boat, lay down beside it, and pretended to be asleep.

‘Presently he saw the young maidens trip down to the strand to don their sealskins. At first all was play and laughter, which was changed to weeping and wailing when one of the mermaids could not find her seal robe. Her companions ran up and down the strand and helped her search for it, but no trace could they find. While they were seeking they noticed that the sky was growing pale and the day was breaking, so they could tarry no longer, and they all swam away, leaving behind the one whose sealskin was missing. She sat on the strand and wept.

‘The fisherman felt sorry for her, of course, but he forced himself to lie still till daybreak. Then he got up, pushed the boat into the water, and stepped into it to make it appear that he saw her by chance after he had lifted the oars.

“‘Who are you?’’ he called out. “‘Are you shipwrecked?’’

‘She ran toward him and asked if he had seen her sealskin. The fisherman looked as if he did not know what she was talking about. She sat down again and wept. Then he suggested that she should go with him in the boat. “‘Come with me to my cottage,’’ he said, “‘and my mother will take care of you. You can’t stay here on the island, where you have neither food nor shelter!’’ He talked so convincingly that she was persuaded to step into his boat.

‘Both the fisherman and his mother were very kind to the poor mermaid, and she seemed to be happy with them. She grew more contented every day and helped the older woman with her work, and was exactly like any other island lass—only she was much prettier. One

day the fisherman asked her if she would be his wife, and she did not object, but at once said yes.

‘Preparations were made for the wedding. The mermaid dressed as a bride in her green, trailing robe with the shimmering pearl crown she had worn when the fisherman first saw her. There was neither church nor parson in the archipelago at that time, so the bridal party seated themselves in the boats to row up into Lake Mälar and get married in the first church they should find.

‘The fisherman had the mermaid and his mother in his boat, and he rowed so well that he was far ahead of all the others. When he had come so far that he could see the islet in the river where he won his bride, he could not help smiling.

‘“What are you smiling at?” she asked.

‘“Oh, I’m thinking of that night when I hid your sealskin,” answered the fisherman; for he felt so sure of her that he thought there was no longer any need for him to conceal anything.

‘“What are you saying?” asked the bride. “Surely I have never possessed a sealskin.” It appeared she had forgotten everything.

‘“Don’t you recollect how you danced with the mermaids?” he asked.

‘“I don’t know what you mean,” said the bride. “I think that you must have dreamed a strange dream last night.”

‘“If I show you your sealskin, you’ll believe me, won’t you?” said the fisherman, promptly turning the boat toward the islet. They stepped ashore and he brought the sealskin out from under the stone where he had hidden it.

‘But the instant the bride set eyes on the sealskin she

grasped it and drew it over her head. It snuggled close to her—as if there was life in it—and immediately she threw herself into the stream.

‘The bridegroom saw her swim away and plunged into the water after her; but he could not catch up to her. When he saw that he couldn’t stop her in any other way, in his grief he seized his spear and hurled it. He aimed better than he had intended, for the poor mermaid gave a piercing shriek and disappeared in the depths.

‘The fisherman stood on the strand waiting for her to appear again. He noticed that the water around him began to take on a soft sheen, a beauty that he had never seen before. It shimmered in pink and white, like the colour-play on the inside of sea shells.

‘As the glittering water lapped the shores the fisherman thought that they too were transformed. They began to blossom and waft their perfumes. A soft sheen spread over them and they also took on a beauty which they had never possessed before.’

When the stately old gentleman had got thus far in his narrative he turned to Clement and looked at him. Clement nodded but made no comment, as he did not wish to cause a break in the story.

‘Now you must bear this in mind, Clement,’ the old gentleman continued, with a roguish glint in his eyes. ‘From that time on people moved to the islands. At first only fishermen and peasants settled there, but others too were attracted to them. One day the king and his earl sailed up the stream. They started at once to talk of these islands, having observed they were so placed that every vessel that sailed toward Lake Mälar had to pass them. The earl suggested that there ought to be a lock put on the channel which could be opened

or closed at will, to let in merchant vessels and shut out pirates.

‘This idea was carried out,’ said the old gentleman, as he rose and began to trace in the sand again with his cane. ‘On the largest of these islands the earl erected a fortress with a strong tower, which was called “Kärnan.” And around the island a wall was built. Here, at the north and south ends of the wall, they made gates and placed strong towers over them. Across to the other islands they built bridges; these were likewise equipped with high towers. Out in the water, round about, they put a wreath of piles with bars that could open and close, so that no vessel could sail past without permission.

‘Therefore you see, Clement, the four islands which had lain so long unnoticed were soon strongly fortified. But this was not all, for the shores and the sound tempted people, and before long they came from all quarters to settle there. They built a church, which has since been called “Storkyrkan.” Here it stands, near the castle. And here, within the walls, were the little huts the pioneers built for themselves. They were primitive but they served their purpose. More was not needed at that time to make the place pass for a city. And the city was named Stockholm.

At this point in the narrative another gentleman appeared and walked rapidly down the path toward the man who was talking to Clement, but he waved his hand, and the other remained at a distance. The dignified old gentleman still sat on the bench beside the fiddler.

‘Now, Clement, you must render me a service,’ he said. ‘I have no time to talk more with you, but I will send you a book about Stockholm and you must read it from cover to cover. I have, so to speak, laid the

foundations of Stockholm for you. Study the rest out for yourself and learn how the city has thrived and changed.

‘As you read about Stockholm, remember that I have spoken the truth, for the city has the power to draw every one to it. First the king moved here, then the nobles built their palaces here, and then one after another was attracted to the place, so that now, as you see, Stockholm is not a city unto itself or for nearby districts ; it has grown into a city for the whole kingdom.’

The handsome old gentleman had raised his voice, so that it rang out strong and commanding, and his eyes shone. Then he rose, and, with a wave of his hand to Clement, walked away. Clement understood that the one who had been talking to him was a great man, and he bowed to him as low as he could.

The next day came a royal lackey with a big red book and a letter for Clement, and in the letter it said that the book was from the king.

After that the little old man, Clement Larsson, was light-headed for several days, and it was impossible to get a sensible word out of him. When a week had gone by he went to the superintendent and gave in his notice. He simply had to go home.

‘Why must you go home? Can’t you learn to be content here?’ asked the doctor.

‘Oh, I’m contented here,’ said Clement. ‘That matter troubles me no longer, but I must go home all the same.’

Clement was quite perturbed because the king had said that he should learn all about Stockholm and be happy there. But he could not rest until he had told every one at home that the king had said those words

to him. He could not renounce the idea of standing outside the church knoll at home and telling high and low that the king had been so kind to him, that he had sat beside him on the bench, and had sent him a book, and had taken the time to talk to him—a poor fiddler—for a whole hour, in order to cure him of his homesickness. It was good to relate this to the Laplanders and Dalecarlian peasant girls at Skansen, but what was that compared to being able to tell of it at home?

Even if Clement were to end in the poorhouse it wouldn't be so hard after this. He was a totally different man from what he had been, and he would be respected and honoured in a very different way.

This new yearning took possession of Clement. He simply had to go up to the doctor and say that he must go home.

PART EIGHT

GORGO, THE EAGLE

IN THE MOUNTAIN GLEN

FAR UP among the mountains of Lapland there was an old eagle's nest on a ledge which projected from a high cliff. The nest was made of dry twigs of pine and spruce, interlaced one with another until they formed a perfect network. Year by year the nest had been repaired and strengthened. It was about two metres wide, and nearly as high as a Laplander's hut.

The cliff on which the eagle's nest was built towered above a big glen, which was inhabited in summer by a flock of wild geese, as it was an excellent refuge for them. It was so secluded between cliffs that not many knew of it, even among the Laplanders themselves.

In the heart of this glen there was a small round lake in which was an abundance of food for the tiny goslings, and on the tufted lake shores which were covered with willows and dwarf birches the geese found fine nesting-places.

All through the ages eagles had lived on the mountain, and geese in the glen. Every year the former carried off a few of the latter, but they were very careful not to take so many that the wild geese would be afraid to remain in the glen. The geese in their turn found the eagles quite useful. They were robbers, to be sure, but they kept other robbers away.

Two years before Nils Holgersson travelled with the wild geese the old leader-goose, Akka from Kebnekaise,

was standing at the foot of the mountain slope looking toward the eagles' nest.

The eagles were in the habit of starting on their hunt soon after sunrise; during the summers that Akka had lived in the glen she had watched every morning for their departure to find if they stopped in the glen to hunt, or if they flew beyond it to other hunting grounds.

She did not have to wait long before the two eagles left the ledge on the cliff. Stately and terror-striking they soared into the air. They directed their course toward the plain, and Akka breathed a sigh of relief.

The old leader-goose's days of nesting and rearing of young were over, and during the summer she passed the time going from one goose range to another, giving counsel regarding the brooding and care of the young. Apart from this she kept an eye out not only for eagles but also for mountain foxes and owls and all other enemies who were a menace to the wild geese and their young.

About noontime Akka began to watch for the eagles again. This she had done every day during all the summers that she had lived in the glen. She could tell at once by their flight if their hunt had been successful, and in that event she felt relieved for the safety of those who belonged to her. But on this particular day she had not seen the eagles return. 'I must be getting old and stupid,' she thought, when she had waited some time for them. 'The eagles have probably been home long ago.'

In the afternoon she looked toward the cliff again, expecting to see the eagles perched on the rocky ledge where they usually took their afternoon rest; toward evening, when they would take their bath in the dale lake, she tried again to get sight of them but failed. Again she bemoaned the fact that she was growing old.

She was so accustomed to having the eagles on the mountain above her that she could not imagine the possibility of their not having returned.

The following morning Akka was awake in good time to watch for the eagles; but she did not see them. On the other hand, she heard in the morning stillness a cry that sounded both angry and plaintive, and it seemed to come from the eagles' nest. 'Can there possibly be anything amiss with the eagles?' she wondered. She spread her wings quickly and rose so high that she could perfectly well look down into the nest.

There she saw neither of the eagles. There was no one in the nest save a little half-fledged eaglet who was screaming for food.

Akka sank down toward the eagles' nest, slowly and reluctantly. It was a gruesome place. It was plain what kind of robbers lived here. In the nest and on the cliff ledge lay bleached bones, bloody feathers, pieces of skin, hares' heads, birds' beaks, and the tufted claws of grouse. The eaglet, who was lying in the midst of this, was repulsive to look upon, with his big, gaping bill, his awkward, down-clad body, and his undeveloped wings where the young quills stuck out like thorns.

At last Akka conquered her repugnance and alighted on the edge of the nest, at the same time glancing about her anxiously in every direction, for each second she expected to see the old eagles coming back.

'It is well that someone has come at last,' cried the baby eagle. 'Fetch me some food at once!'

'Well, well, don't be in such haste,' said Akka. 'Tell me first where your father and mother are.'

'That's what I should like to know myself. They went off yesterday morning and left me a lemming to live upon while they were away. You can imagine

that was eaten long ago. It's a shame for mother to let me starve in this way!'

Akka began to think that the eagles had really been shot, and she reasoned that if she were to let the eaglet starve she might perhaps be rid of the whole robber tribe for all time. But it went very much against her not to succour a deserted young one so far as she could.



'Why do you sit there and stare?' snapped the eaglet.
'Didn't you hear me say I want food?'

Akka spread her wings and sank down to the little lake in the glen. A moment later she returned to the eagles' nest with a salmon trout in her bill.

The eaglet flew into a temper when she dropped the fish in front of him.

'Do you think I can eat such stuff?' he shrieked, pushing it aside and trying to strike Akka with his bill.

‘Fetch me a willow grouse or a lemming, do you hear?’

Akka stretched her head forward and gave the eaglet a sharp nip in the neck. ‘Let me say to you,’ remarked the old goose, ‘that if I’m to procure food for you, you must be satisfied with what I give you. Your father and mother are dead, and from them you can get no help; but if you want to lie here and starve to death while you wait for grouse and lemming, I shall not hinder you.’

When Akka had spoken her mind she promptly retired, and did not appear at the eagles’ nest again for some time. But when she did return, the eaglet had eaten the fish, and when she dropped another in front of him he swallowed it at once, although it was plain that he found it very distasteful.

Akka had imposed upon herself a tedious task. The old eagles never appeared again, and she alone had to procure for the eaglet all the food he needed. She gave him fish and frogs and he did not seem to fare badly on this diet, but grew big and strong. He soon forgot his parents, the eagles, and believed that Akka was his real mother. Akka, in turn, loved him as if he had been her own child. She tried to give him a good bringing up, and to cure him of his wildness and overbearing ways.

After a fortnight Akka noticed that the time was approaching for her to moult and put on a new feather dress. For a whole moon she would be unable to carry food to the baby eaglet, and he might starve to death.

So Akka said to him one day: ‘Gorgo, I can’t come to you any more with fish. Everything depends now upon your pluck—which means can you dare to venture into the glen, so that I can continue to procure food for you? You must choose between starvation and flying

down to the glen, but that too may cost you your life.'

Without a second's hesitation the eaglet stepped upon the edge of the nest. Barely taking the trouble to measure the distance to the bottom, he spread his tiny wings and started away. He rolled over and over in the air, but nevertheless made enough use of his wings to reach the ground almost unhurt.

Down there in the glen Gorgo passed the summer in company with the little goslings, and was a good comrade for them. Since he regarded himself as a gosling he tried to live as they lived; when they swam in the lake he followed them until he was nearly drowned. It was most embarrassing to him that he could not learn to swim, and he went to Akka and complained.

'Why can't I swim like the others?' he asked.

'Your claws grew too hooked, and your toes too large while you were up there on the cliff,' Akka replied. 'But don't be unhappy because of that. You'll be a fine bird all the same.'

The eaglet's wings soon grew so large that they could carry him; but not until autumn, when the goslings learned to fly, did it dawn upon him that he could use them for flight. There came a proud time for him, for at this sport he was the peer of them all. His companions never stayed up in the air any longer than they had to, but he stayed there nearly the whole day, and practised the art of flying. So far it had not occurred to him that he was of another species than the geese, but he could not help noting a number of things that surprised him, and he questioned Akka constantly.

'Why do grouse and lemming run and hide when they see my shadow on the cliff?' he queried. 'They don't show such fear of the other goslings.'

'Your wings grew too big when you were on the cliff,' said Akka. 'It is that which frightens the little wretches. But don't be unhappy because of that. You'll be a fine bird all the same.'

After the eagle had learned to fly, he taught himself to fish and to catch frogs. But by and by he began to ponder this also.

'How does it happen that I live on fish and frogs?' he asked. 'The other goslings don't.'

'This is due to the fact that I had no other food to give you when you were on the cliff,' said Akka. 'But don't be unhappy because of that. You'll be a fine bird all the same.'

When the wild geese began their autumn moving, Gorgo flew along with the flock, regarding himself all the while as one of them. The air was filled with birds who were on their way south, and there was great excitement among them when Akka appeared with an eagle in her train. The wild goose flock was continually surrounded by swarms of the curious who loudly expressed their astonishment. Akka bade them be silent, but it was impossible to stop so many wagging tongues.

'Why do they call me an eagle?' Gorgo asked repeatedly, growing more and more exasperated. 'Can't they see that I'm a wild goose? I'm no bird-eater who preys upon his kind. How dare they give me such an ugly name?'

One day they flew above a farm where many chickens were scratching in the yard. 'An eagle! An eagle!' shrieked the chickens, and started to run for shelter. But Gorgo, who had heard the eagles spoken of as savage criminals, could not control his anger. He snapped his wings together and shot down to the ground, striking his talons into one of the hens. 'I'll teach you,

I will, that I'm no eagle!' he screamed furiously, and struck with his beak.

That instant he heard Akka call to him from the air, and rose obediently. The wild goose flew toward him and began to reprimand him. 'What are you trying to do?' she cried, beating him with her bill. 'Did you mean to tear that poor hen to pieces?' But when the eagle took his punishment from the wild goose without a protest, there arose from the great bird throng around them a perfect storm of taunts and gibes. The eagle heard this, and turned toward Akka with flaming eyes, as though he would have liked to attack her. But he suddenly changed his mind, and with quick wing strokes bounded into the air, soaring so high that no call could reach him; and he sailed around up there as long as the wild geese saw him.

Two days later he appeared again in the wild goose flock.

'I know who I am,' he said to Akka. 'Since I am an eagle, I must live as becomes an eagle; but I think that we can be friends all the same. You or any of yours I shall never attack.'

But Akka had set her heart on successfully training an eagle into a mild and harmless bird, and she could not bear his wanting to do as he chose.

'Do you think that I wish to be the friend of a bird-eater?' she asked. 'Live as I have taught you to live, and you may travel with my flock as heretofore.'

Both were proud and stubborn, and neither of them would yield. It ended in Akka's forbidding the eagle to appear near her, and her anger toward him was so intense that no one dared speak his name in her presence.

After that Gorgo roamed around the country, alone

and shunned, like all great robbers. He was often downhearted, and certainly longed many a time for the days when he thought himself a wild goose and played with the merry goslings.

Among the animals he had a great reputation for courage. They used to say of him that he feared no one but his foster-mother, Akka. And they could also say of him that he never used violence against a wild goose.

IN CAPTIVITY

Gorgo was only three years old, and had not as yet thought about marrying and procuring a home for himself, when he was captured one day by a hunter, and sold to the Skansen Zoological Garden, where there were already two eagles held captive in a cage built of iron bars and steel wires. The cage stood out in the open and was so large that a couple of trees had easily been moved into it, and quite a large cairn was piled up in there. Notwithstanding all this, the birds were unhappy. They sat motionless on the same spot nearly all day. Their pretty, dark feather dresses became rough and lustreless, and their eyes were riveted with hopeless longing on the sky without.

During the first week of Gorgo's captivity he was still awake and full of life, but later a heavy torpor came upon him. He perched himself on one spot, like the other eagles, and stared at vacancy. He no longer knew how the days passed.

One morning when Gorgo sat in his usual torpor he heard someone call to him from below. He was so drowsy that he could barely rouse himself enough to lower his glance.

‘Who is calling me?’ he asked.

‘Oh, Gorgo! Don’t you know me? It’s Tummetott who used to fly about with the wild geese.’

‘Is Akka also captured?’ asked Gorgo in the tone of one who is trying to collect his thoughts after a long sleep.

‘No; Akka, and the white gander, and the whole flock are probably safe and sound up in Lapland at this season,’ said the boy. ‘It’s only I who am a prisoner here.’

As the boy was speaking he noticed that Gorgo averted his glance, and began to stare into space again.

‘Golden eagle!’ cried the boy; ‘I have not forgotten that once you carried me back to the wild geese, and that you spared the white gander’s life! Tell me if I can be of any help to you!’

Gorgo scarcely raised his head. ‘Don’t disturb me, Tummetott,’ he yawned. ‘I’m sitting here dreaming that I am free, and am soaring away up among the clouds. I don’t want to be awake.’

‘You must rouse yourself, and see what goes on around you,’ the boy admonished, ‘or you will soon look as wretched as the other eagles.’

‘I wish I were as they are! They are so lost in their dreams that nothing more can trouble them,’ said the eagle.

When night came and all three eagles were asleep, there was a light scraping on the steel wires stretched across the top of the cage. The two listless old captives did not allow themselves to be disturbed by the noise, but Gorgo awakened.

‘Who’s there? Who is moving up on the roof?’ he asked.

‘It’s Tummetott, Gorgo,’ answered the boy. ‘I’m

sitting here filing away at the steel wires so that you can escape.'

The eagle raised his head, and saw in the night light how the boy sat and filed the steel wires at the top of the cage. He felt hopeful for an instant, but soon discouragement got the upper hand.

'I'm a big bird, Tummetott,' said Gorgo; 'how can you ever manage to file away enough wires for me to come out? You'd better give it up and leave me in peace.'

'Oh, go to sleep and don't bother about me!' said Nils. 'I'll not be through to-night nor to-morrow night, but I shall try to free you in time, for here you'll become a total wreck.'

Gorgo fell asleep. When he awoke the next morning he saw at a glance that a number of wires had been filed. That day he felt less drowsy than he had done in the past. He spread his wings and fluttered from branch to branch to get the stiffness out of his joints.

One morning early, just as the first streak of sunlight made its appearance, Nils awakened the eagle.

'Try now, Gorgo!' he whispered.

The eagle looked up. The boy had actually filed off so many wires that now there was a big hole in the wire netting. Gorgo flapped his wings and propelled himself upward. Twice he missed and fell back into the cage; but finally he succeeded in getting out.

With proud wing strokes he soared into the clouds. Little Tummetott sat and gazed after him with a mournful expression. He wished that someone would come and give him his freedom too.

Nils now felt quite at home at Skansen. He had got to know all the animals there and had made many friends among them. He had to admit that there was



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SHE WAS PERSUADED TO STEP INTO HIS BOAT

so much to see and learn there that it was not difficult for him to pass the time. To be sure his thoughts went forth every day to the white gander and his other comrades, and he longed for them. 'If only I weren't bound by my promise,' he thought, 'I'd find some bird to take me to them!'

It may seem strange that Clement Larsson had not given back the boy his freedom, but one must remember how excited the little fiddler had been when he left Skansen. The morning of his departure he had thought of setting out the midget's food in a blue bowl, but, unluckily, he had been unable to find one. All the people at Skansen—Lapps, peasant girls, builders, and gardeners—had come to bid him good-bye, and he had had no time to search for a blue bowl. It was time to start, and at the last moment he had to ask the old Laplander to help him.

'One of the tiny folk happens to be living here at Skansen,' said Clement, 'and every morning I set out a little food for him. Will you do me the favour of taking these few coppers and buying a blue bowl with them? Put a little gruel and milk in it, and to-morrow morning set it out under the steps of Bollnäs cottage.'

The old Laplander looked surprised, but there was no time for Clement to explain further, as he had to be off to the railway station.

The Laplander went down to a shop near by to purchase the bowl. As he saw no blue one that he thought appropriate he bought a white one, and this he conscientiously filled and set out every morning.

That was why the boy had not been released from his pledge. He knew that Clement had gone away, but *he* was not allowed to leave.

That night Nils longed more than ever for his freedom.

This was because summer had come now in earnest. During his travels he had suffered much in cold and stormy weather, and when he first came to Skansen he had thought that perhaps it was just as well that he had been compelled to break the journey. He would have been frozen to death had he gone to Lapland in the month of May. But now it was warm; the earth was green-clad, birches and poplars were clothed in their satiny foliage, and the cherry-trees—in fact all the fruit trees—were covered with blossoms. The berry bushes had green berries on their stems; the oaks had carefully unfolded their leaves, and peas, cabbages, and beans were growing in the vegetable garden at Skansen.

‘Now it must be warm up in Lapland,’ thought Nils. ‘I should like to be seated on the white gander’s back on a fine morning like this! It would be great fun to ride about in the warm, still air, and look down at the ground, as it now lies decked with green grass and covered with pretty blossoms.’

He sat musing on this when the eagle suddenly swooped down from the sky and perched beside the boy on top of the cage.

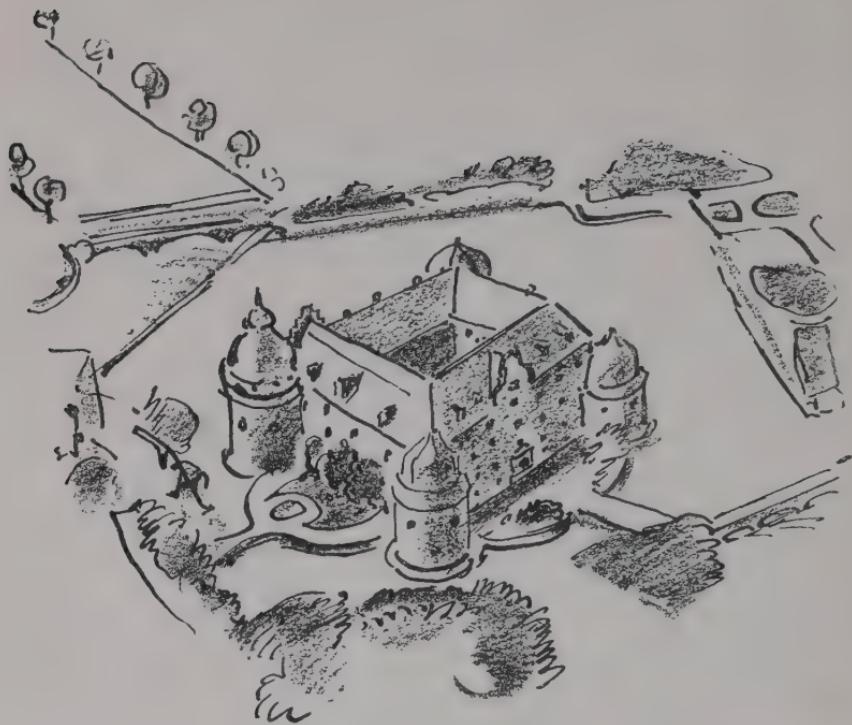
‘I wanted to try my wings to see if they were still good for anything,’ said Gorgo. ‘You didn’t suppose that I meant to leave you here in captivity? Get up on my back and I’ll take you to your comrades.’

‘No, that’s impossible!’ Nils answered. ‘I have pledged my word that I would stay here till I am liberated.’

‘What sort of nonsense are you talking?’ said Gorgo. ‘In the first place they brought you here against your will, then they forced you to promise that you would remain here. Surely you must understand that such a promise one need not keep?’

'Oh no, I must keep it,' said the boy. 'I thank you all the same for your kind intention but you can't help me.'

'Oh, can't I?' said Gorgo. 'We'll see about that!' In a twinkling he grasped Nils Holgersson in his big talons, and rose with him toward the skies, disappearing in a northerly direction.



PART NINE

ON OVER GÄSTRIKLAND

THE EAGLE kept on flying until he was a long distance north of Stockholm. Then he sank to a wooded hillock, where he relaxed his hold on the boy.

The instant Nils was out of Gorgo's clutches he started to run back to the city as fast as he could.

The eagle made a long swoop, caught up to the boy, and stopped him with his claw.

'Do you mean to go back to prison?' he demanded.

'That's my affair. I can go where I like, for all of

you!' retorted the boy, trying to get away. Thereupon the eagle gripped him with his strong talons and rose in the air.

Now Gorgo flew over the entire province of Uppland and did not stop again until he came to the great waterfalls at Älvkarleby, where he alighted on a rock in the middle of the rushing rapids below the roaring falls. Again he relaxed his hold on the captive.

Nils saw that here there was no chance of escape from the eagle. Above them the white, foamy wall of the waterfall came tumbling down, and round about the river rushed along in a mighty torrent. Nils was very indignant to think that in this way he had been forced to become a promise-breaker. He turned his back to the eagle and would not speak to him.

Now that the bird had set the boy down in a place from which he could not run away, he told him that he had been brought up by Akka from Kebnekaise, and that he had quarrelled with his foster-mother.

'Now, Tummetott, perhaps you understand why I wish to take you back to the wild geese,' he said. 'I have heard that you are in great favour with Akka, and it was my purpose to ask you to make peace between us.'

As soon as the boy understood that the eagle had not carried him off wilfully he felt kindly toward him.

'I should like very much to help you,' he replied, 'but I am bound by my promise.' Thereupon he explained to the eagle how he had fallen into captivity and how Clement Larsson had left Skansen without setting him free.

Nevertheless the eagle would not give up his plan.

'Listen to me, Tummetott,' he said. 'My wings can carry you wherever you wish to go, and my eyes can search out whatever you wish to find. Tell me how the

man looks who extracted this promise from you and I will find him and take you to him. Then it is for you to do the rest.'

Nils approved of the proposition.

'I can see, Gorgo, that you have had a wise bird like Akka for a foster-mother,' he remarked.

He gave a graphic description of Clement Larsson, and added that he had heard at Skansen that the little fiddler was from Hälsingland.

'We'll search for him through the whole of Hälsingland—from Lingbo to Mellansjö; from Storberget to Hornland,' said the eagle. 'To-morrow before sundown you shall have a talk with the man!'

'I fear you are promising more than you can perform,' doubted the boy.

'I should be a pretty poor eagle if I couldn't do that much,' said Gorgo.

So when Gorgo and Nils left Alvkarelby they were good friends, and the boy willingly took his place for a ride on the eagle's back. Thus he had an opportunity to see much of the country.

When clutched in the eagle's talons he had seen nothing. Perhaps it was just as well that he did not quite know where he was going, for in the forenoon he had travelled over Upsala, Österby's big ironworks, the Dannemora Mine, and the ancient castle of Örbyhus, and he would have been sadly disappointed at not seeing them had he known how close they were.

The eagle bore him speedily over Gästrikland. In the southern part of the province there was very little to tempt the eye. But as they flew northward it began to be interesting.

'This country is clad in a spruce skirt and a grey-stone jacket,' thought the boy. 'But around its waist it

wears a girdle which has not its match in value, for it is embroidered with blue lakes and green woods. The great ironworks adorn it like a row of precious stones, and its buckle is a whole city with castles and cathedrals and great clusters of houses.'

When the travellers arrived in the northern forest region, Gorgo alighted on top of a mountain. As Nils dismounted, the eagle said:

'There's game in this forest, and I can't forget my recent captivity and feel really free until I have gone a-hunting. You won't mind my leaving you for a while?'

'No, of course I won't,' the boy assured him.

'You may go where you like if only you are back here by sundown,' said the eagle, as he flew off.

Nils sat on a stone gazing across the bare, rocky ground and the great forests round about.

He felt rather lonely. But soon he heard singing in the forest below, and saw something bright moving amongst the trees. Presently he saw a blue and yellow banner, and he knew by the songs and the merry chatter that it was being borne at the head of a procession. On it came, up the winding path; he wondered where it and those who followed it were going. He couldn't believe that anybody would come up to such an ugly, desolate waste as the place where he sat. But the banner was nearing the forest border, and behind it marched many happy people for whom it had led the way. Suddenly there was life and movement all over the mountain plain; after that there was so much for the boy to see that he didn't have a dull moment.

PART TEN

A DAY IN HÄLSINGLAND

A LARGE GREEN LEAF

THE following day Nils travelled over Hälsingland. It spread beneath him with new pale-green shoots on the pine-trees, new birch leaves in the groves, new green grass in the meadows, and sprouting grain in the fields. It was a mountainous country, but directly through it ran a broad, light valley from either side of which branched other valleys—some short and narrow, some broad and long.

‘This land resembles a leaf,’ thought the boy, ‘for it’s as green as a leaf, and the valleys spring out in about the same way as the veins of a leaf.’

It was a picturesque country to look down upon, and the boy saw a good deal of it, because the eagle was trying to find the old fiddler, Clement Larsson, and flew from valley to valley looking for him.

A little later in the morning there was life and movement on every farm. The doors of the cattle-sheds were thrown wide open and the cows were let out. They were light-coloured, small, supple, and sure-footed, and so sprightly that they made the most comic leaps and bounds. After them came the calves and sheep, and it was plainly to be seen that they too were in the best of spirits.

It grew livelier every moment in the farmyards. A couple of young girls with rucksacks on their backs walked among the cattle; a boy with a long switch kept the sheep together, and a little dog ran in and out among

the cows, barking at the ones that tried to toss him. The farmer hitched a horse to a cart loaded with tubs of butter, boxes of cheese, and all kinds of eatables. The people laughed and chattered. They and the beasts were alike merry—as if looking forward to a day of real pleasure.

A moment later all were on their way to the forest. One of the girls walked in the lead and coaxed the cattle with pretty, musical calls. The animals followed in a long line. The shepherd boy and the sheep-dog ran hither and thither to see that no creature turned from the right course; and last came the farmer and his hired man. They walked beside the cart to prevent its being upset, for the road they followed was a narrow, stony forest path.

It may have been the custom for all the peasants in Hälplingland to send their cattle into the forests on the same day—or perhaps it only happened so that year; at any rate Nils saw how processions of happy people and cattle wandered out from every valley and every farm and turned into the lonely forest, filling it with life. From the depths of the dense woods the boy heard the shepherd maidens' songs and the tinkle of the cowbells. Many of the processions had long and difficult roads to travel; and the boy saw how they tramped through marshes, how they had to take roundabout ways to get past windfalls, and how, time and again, the carts bumped against stones and turned over with all their contents. But the people met all the obstacles with jokes and laughter.

In the afternoon they came to cleared spaces where cattle-sheds and a couple of rude huts had been built. The cows mooed with delight as they tramped on the luscious green grass in the yards between the huts,

and at once began grazing. The peasants, with merry chatter and banter, carried water and wood and all that had been brought in the carts into the larger hut. Presently smoke rose from the chimney and then the dairymaids, the shepherd boy, and the men squatted upon a flat rock and ate their supper.

Gorgo, the eagle, was certain that he should find Clement Larsson among those who were off for the forest. Whenever he saw a stock farm procession he sank down and scrutinized it with his sharp eyes; but hour after hour passed without his finding the one he sought.

After much circling around, toward evening they came to a stony and desolate tract east of the great main valley. There the boy saw another outlying stock farm under him. The people and the cattle had arrived. The men were splitting wood, and the dairymaids were milking the cows.

‘Look there!’ said Gorgo. ‘I think we’ve got him.’

He sank and, to his great astonishment, the boy saw that the eagle was right. There indeed stood little Clement Larsson chopping wood.

Gorgo alighted on a pine-tree in the thick woods a little away from the house.

‘I have fulfilled my obligation,’ said the eagle, with a proud toss of his head. ‘Now you must try and have a word with the man. I’ll perch here at the top of the thick pine and wait for you.’

THE ANIMALS’ NEW YEAR’S EVE

The day’s work was done at the forest farms, supper was over, and the peasants sat about and chatted. It was a long time since they had been in the forest of a summer’s night, and they seemed reluctant to go to

bed and sleep. It was as light as day, and the dairymaids were busy with their needlework. Ever and anon they raised their heads, looked toward the forest and smiled. 'Now we are here again!' they said. The busy village faded from their minds, and the forest, with its peaceful stillness, enfolded them. When at home they had wondered how they should ever be able to endure the loneliness of the woods; but once there, they felt that this was, after all, the best life.

Many of the young girls and young men from neighbouring farms had come to call upon them, so that there was quite a lot of folk seated on the grass before the huts; but they did not find it easy to start conversation. The men were going home the next day, so the dairymaids gave them little commissions and bade them take greetings to their friends in the village. This was nearly all that had been said.

Suddenly the eldest of the dairy girls looked up from her work and said laughingly:

'There's no need for us to sit here so silent to-night, for we have two story-tellers with us. One is Clement Larsson, who sits beside me, and the other is Bernhard from Sunnansjö, who stands back there gazing toward Black's Ridge. I think that we should ask each of them to tell us a story. To the one who entertains us the better I shall give the muffler I am knitting.'

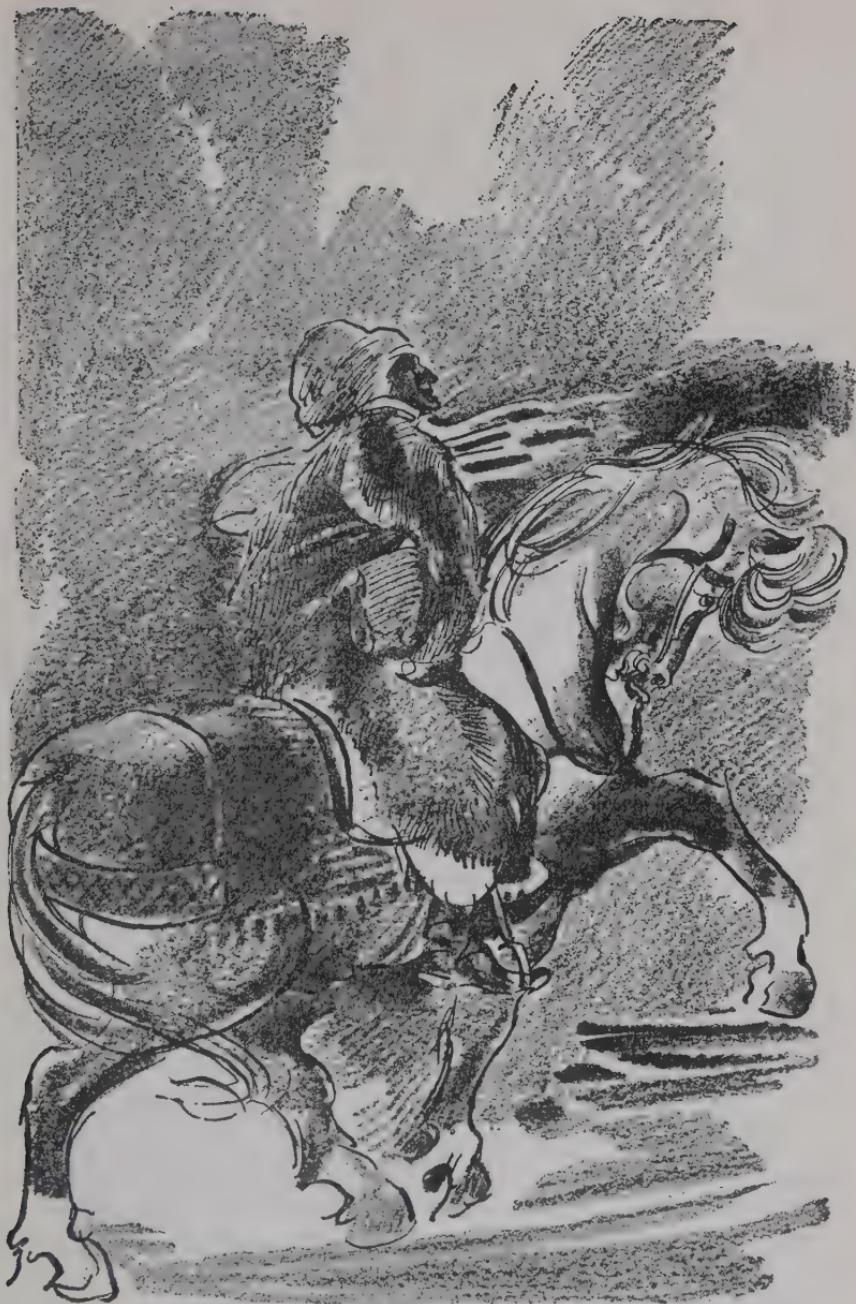
This proposal won hearty applause. The two competitors offered lame excuses, naturally, but were quickly persuaded. Clement asked Bernhard to begin, and he did not object. He knew little of Clement Larsson, but assumed that he would come out with some story about ghosts and trolls. As he knew that people liked to listen to such things, he thought it best to choose something of the same sort.

‘Some centuries ago,’ he began, ‘a parson here in Delsbo was riding through the dense forest on a New Year’s Eve. He was on horseback, dressed in fur coat and cap. On the pommel of his saddle hung a bag in which he kept the communion service, the prayer-book, and his surplice. He had been summoned on a parochial errand to a remote part of the forest, where he had talked with a sick person until late in the evening. Now he was on his way home, but feared that he should not get back to the parsonage until after midnight.

‘The horse the parson rode was one he prized very highly. He was strong and sturdy, and quite as wise as a human being. He could find his way home from any place in the parish. The parson had observed this on several occasions, and he relied upon it with such a sense of security that he never troubled himself to think where he was going when he rode that horse. So he came along now in the grey night, through the bewildering forest, with the reins dangling and his thoughts far away.

‘He was thinking of the sermon he had to preach on the morrow, and of much else besides, and it was a long time before it occurred to him to notice how far along he was on his homeward way. When he did glance up, he saw that the forest was as dense about him as at the beginning, and he was somewhat surprised, for he had ridden so long that he should have come to the inhabited portion of the parish.

‘He intended to turn the horse at once but hesitated. The animal had never strayed, and it did not seem likely that he would do so now. It was more likely that the parson was mistaken. He had been far away in thought and had not looked at the road. So he let the horse continue in the same direction, and again lost himself in his reverie.



He was on horseback, dressed in fur coat and cap

‘Suddenly a big branch struck him and almost swept him off the horse. Then he realized that he must find out where he was.

‘He glanced down and saw that he was riding over a soft marsh, where there was no beaten path. The horse trotted along at a brisk pace and showed no uncertainty. Again the parson was positive that he was going in the wrong direction, and now he did not hesitate to interfere. He seized the reins and turned the horse about, guiding him back to the roadway. No sooner was he there than he turned again and made straight for the woods.

‘The parson was certain that he was going wrong, but because the horse was so persistent he thought that probably he was trying to find a better road, and let him go along.

‘The horse did very well, although he had no path to follow. If a precipice obstructed his way he climbed it as nimbly as a goat, and later, when they had to descend, he bunched his hoofs and slid down the rocky inclines.

“‘May he only find his way home before church time!’ thought the parson. “I wonder how the Delsbo folk would take it if I were not at my church on time?”

‘He did not have to brood over this long, for soon he came to a place that was familiar to him. It was a little dark tarn where he had fished the summer before. Now he saw it was as he had feared—he was in the depths of the forest, and the horse was plodding along in a south-easterly direction. He seemed determined to carry the parson as far from church and parsonage as he could.

‘The clergyman dismounted. He could not let the horse carry him into the wilderness. He must go home. And, since the animal persisted in going in the wrong

direction, he decided to walk and lead him until they came to more familiar roads. The parson wound the reins around his arm and began to walk. It was not an easy matter to tramp through the forest in a heavy fur coat; but he was strong and hardy and had little fear of over-exertion.

'The horse, meanwhile, caused him fresh anxiety. He would not follow but planted his hoofs firmly on the ground.

'At last the man was angry. He had never beaten that horse, nor did he wish to do so now. Instead he threw down the reins and walked away.

"We may as well part company here, since you want to go your own way," he said.

'He had not taken more than two steps before the horse came after him, took a cautious grip on his coat sleeve, and stopped him. The parson turned and looked the horse straight in the eyes, as if to search out why he behaved so strangely.

'Afterward he could not quite understand how this was possible, but it is certain that, dark as it was, he plainly saw the horse's face and read it like that of a human being. He realized that the animal was in a terrible state of apprehension and fear. He gave his master a look that was both imploring and reproachful.

"I have served you day after day and done your bidding," he seemed to say. "Will you not follow me this one night?"

'The parson was touched by the appeal in the animal's eyes. It was clear that the horse needed his help tonight, in one way or another. Being a man through and through, he promptly determined to follow him. Without further delay he sprang into the saddle. "Go on!" he said. "I will not desert you since you want me.

No one shall say of the parson in Delsbo that he refused to accompany a creature who was in trouble."

'He let the horse go as he wished and thought only of keeping his seat. It proved to be a hazardous and troublesome journey—uphill most of the way. The forest was so thick that he could not see two feet ahead, but it appeared to him that they were ascending a high mountain. The horse climbed perilous steeps. Had the parson been guiding he should not have thought of riding over such ground.

"‘Surely you don’t intend to go up to Black’s Ridge, do you?’” laughed the parson, who knew that was one of the highest peaks in Hälsingland.

‘During the ride he discovered that he and the horse were not the only ones who were out that night. He heard stones roll down and branches crackle, as if animals were breaking their way through the forest. He remembered that wolves were plentiful in that part and wondered if the horse wished to lead him to an encounter with wild beasts.

‘They mounted up and up, and the higher they went the more scattered were the trees. At last they rode on almost bare highland, where the man could look in every direction. He gazed out over immeasurable tracts of land, which went up and down in mountains and valleys covered with sombre forests. It was so dark that he had difficulty in recognizing the place, but presently he could make out where he was.

‘‘Why of course it’s Black’s Ridge that I’ve come to,’’ he thought to himself. ‘‘It can’t be any other mountain, for there, in the west, I see the big hill Arvsöklack, and to the east the sea glitters around Agön Island. Toward the north also I see something shiny. It must be Lake Dellen. In the depths below me I see white smoke from

Nian Falls. Yes, I'm up on Black's Ridge. What an adventure!"

'When they were at the summit the horse stopped behind a thick pine, as if to hide. The parson bent forward and pushed aside the branches that he might have an unobstructed view.

'The mountain's bald pate confronted him. It was not empty and desolate, as he had anticipated. In the middle of the open space was an immense boulder around which many wild beasts had gathered. Apparently they were holding a conclave of some sort.

'Near to the big rock he saw bears, so firmly and heavily built that they seemed like fur-clad blocks of stone. They were lying down and their little eyes blinked impatiently; it was obvious that they had come from their winter sleep to attend court, and that they could hardly keep awake. Behind them, in tight rows, were hundreds of wolves. They were not sleepy, for wolves are more alert in winter than in summer. They sat upon their haunches, like dogs, whipping the ground with their tails and panting—their tongues lolling far out of their jaws. Behind the wolves the lynx skulked, stiff-legged and clumsy, like misshapen cats. They were loath to be among the other beasts, and hissed and spat when one came near them. The row behind the lynx was occupied by the wolverines, with dog faces and bear coats. They were not happy on the ground, and they stamped their pads impatiently, longing to get into the trees. Behind them, covering the entire space to the forest border, leaped the foxes, the weasels, and the martens. These were small and gracefully built, but they looked even more savage and bloodthirsty than the larger beasts.

'All this the parson plainly saw, for the whole place

was illuminated. Upon the huge rock at the centre was the Wood-nymph, who held in her hand a pine torch which burned in a big red flame. The Nymph was as tall as the tallest tree in the forest. She wore a spruce-brush mantle and had spruce-cone hair. She stood very still, her face turned toward the forest. She was watching and listening.

‘The parson saw everything as plain as plain could be, but his astonishment was so great that he refused to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

“Such things cannot possibly happen!” he thought. “I have ridden much too long in the bleak forest. This is only a hallucination.”

‘Nevertheless he gave the closest attention to the spectacle, and wondered what was about to be done.

‘He hadn’t long to wait before he caught the sound of a familiar bell, coming from the depths of the forest, and the next moment he heard footfalls and crackling of branches—as when many animals break through the forest.

‘A big herd of cattle was climbing the mountain. They came through the forest in the order in which they had marched to the mountain farms. First came the bell cow followed by the bull, then the other cows and the calves. The sheep, closely herded, followed. After them came the goats, and last were the horses and colts. The sheep-dog trotted along beside the sheep; but neither shepherd nor shepherdess attended them.

‘The parson thought it heart-rending to see the tame animals coming straight toward the wild beasts. He would gladly have blocked their way and called “Halt!” but he understood that it was not within human power to stop the march of the cattle on this night; therefore he made no move.

'The domestic animals were in a state of torment over that which they had to face. They looked wretched and scared. Even the bell cow advanced with drooping head and faltering step. The goats had no desire either to play or to butt. The horses tried to bear up bravely, but their bodies were all of a quiver with fright. The most pathetic of all was the sheep-dog. He kept his tail between his legs and crawled on the ground.

'The bell cow led the procession all the way up to the Wood-nymph, who stood on the boulder at the top of the mountain. The cow walked around the rock and then turned toward the forest without any of the wild beasts touching her. In the same way all the cattle walked unmolested past the wild beasts.

'As the creatures filed past, the parson saw the Wood-nymph lower her pine torch over one and another of them.

'Every time this occurred the beasts of prey broke into loud, exultant roars—particularly when it was lowered over a cow or some other large creature. The animal that saw the torch turning toward it uttered a piercing shriek, as if it had received a knife thrust in its flesh, while the entire herd to which it belonged bellowed their lamentations.

'Then the man began to understand the meaning of what he saw. Surely he had heard that the animals in Delsbo assembled on Black's Ridge every New Year's Eve that the Wood-nymph might mark out which among the tame beasts would that year be prey for the wild beasts. The parson pitied the poor creatures that were at the mercy of savage beasts when in reality they should have no master but man.

'The leading herd had only just left when another bell tinkled, and the cattle from another farm tramped

to the mountain top. These came in the same order as the first and marched past the Wood-nymph, who stood there, stern and solemn, indicating animal after animal for death.

'Herd upon herd followed, without a break in the line of procession. Some were so small that they included only one cow and a few sheep; others consisted of only a pair of goats. It was apparent that these were from very humble homes, but they too were compelled to pass in review.

'The parson thought of the Delsbo farmers, who had so much love for their beasts. "Did they but know of it, surely they would not allow this to go on," he thought. "They would risk their own lives rather than let their cattle wander amongst bears and wolves, to be doomed by the Wood-nymph."

'The last herd to appear was the one from the rectory farm. The parson heard the sound of the familiar bell a long way off. The horse too must have heard it, for he began to shake in every limb and was bathed in sweat.

"So it is your turn now to pass before the Wood-nymph to receive your sentence," the parson said to the horse. "Don't be afraid. Now I know why you brought me here, and I shall not leave you."

'The fine cattle from the parsonage farm emerged from the forest and marched to the Wood-nymph and the wild beasts. Last in the line was the horse that had brought his master to Black's Ridge. The parson did not leave the saddle but let the animal take him to the Wood-nymph.

'He had neither knife nor gun for his defence, but he had taken out the prayer-book and sat pressing it to his heart as he went into battle against evil.

'At first it appeared as if none had noticed him. The

parson's cattle filed past the Wood-nymph in the same order as the others had done. She did not wave the torch toward any of these, but as soon as the intelligent horse stepped forward she made a movement to mark him for death.

'Instantly the parson held up the prayer-book, and the torchlight fell upon the cross on its cover. The Wood-nymph uttered a loud, shrill cry and let the torch drop from her hand.

'Immediately the flame was extinguished. In the sudden transition from light to darkness the parson saw nothing, nor did he hear anything. About him reigned the profound stillness of a wilderness in winter.

'Then the dark clouds parted, and through the opening appeared the full round moon to shed its light upon the ground. The parson saw that he and the horse were alone on the summit of Black's Ridge. Not one of the many wild beasts was there. The ground had not been trampled by the herds that had passed over it; but the parson himself sat with his prayer-book before him, while the horse under him stood trembling and sweating.

'By the time he reached home he no longer knew whether or not it had been a dream, a vision, or reality —this that he had seen; but he took it as a warning to him to remember the poor creatures who were at the mercy of wild beasts. He preached so powerfully to the Delsbo peasants that in his day all the wolves and bears were exterminated in that parish, although they may have returned since his time.'

Here Bernhard ended his story. He received praise from all sides and it seemed to be a foregone conclusion that he would get the prize. The majority thought it almost a pity that Clement had to compete with him.

But Clement, undaunted, began :

‘One day, while I was living at Skansen, just outside of Stockholm, and longing for home . . .’ Then he told about the tiny midget he had ransomed so that he would not have to be confined in a cage, to be stared at by all the people. He told also that no sooner had he performed this act of mercy than he was rewarded for it. He talked and talked, and the astonishment of his hearers grew greater and greater; but when he came to the royal lackey and the beautiful book, all the dairymaids dropped their needlework and sat staring at Clement in open-eyed wonder at his marvellous experiences.

As soon as Clement had finished the eldest of the dairymaids announced that he should have the muffler.

‘Bernhard related only things that happened to another, but Clement has himself been the hero of a true story, which I consider far more important.’

In this all agreed. They regarded Clement with very different eyes after hearing that he had talked with the king, and the little fiddler was afraid to show how proud he felt. But at the very height of his elation someone asked him what had become of the midget.

‘I had no time to set out the blue bowl for him myself,’ said Clement, ‘so I asked the old Laplander to do it. What has become of him since then I don’t know.’

No sooner had he spoken than a little pine cone came along and struck him on the nose. It did not drop from a tree, and none of the peasants had thrown it. It was simply impossible to tell whence it had come.

‘Aha, Clement!’ winked the dairymaid, ‘it appears as if the tiny folk were listening to us. You should not have left it to another to set out that blue bowl!’

PART ELEVEN

IN MEDELPAD

THE BOY and the eagle were out bright and early the next morning. Gorgo hoped that he would get far up into Västerbotten that day. But as luck would have it, he heard Nils remark to himself that in a country like the one through which they were now travelling it must be impossible for people to live.

The land which spread below them was Southern Medelpad, where there was nothing but desolate forests. When the eagle heard the boy's remark, he replied :

‘Up here they have forests for fields.’

Nils thought of the contrast between the light, golden rye fields with their delicate blades that spring up in one summer, and the dark spruce forest with its solid trees which took many years to ripen for harvest.

‘A man who has to get his livelihood from such a field must have a great deal of patience,’ he said.

Nothing more was said until they came to a place where the forest had been cleared and the ground was covered with stumps and lopped-off branches. As they flew over this ground the eagle heard Nils mutter to himself that it was a dreadfully ugly and poverty-stricken place.

‘This field was cleared last winter,’ said the eagle.

The boy thought of the harvesters at home, who rode on their reaping machines on fine summer mornings and in a short time mowed a large field. But the forest field was harvested in winter. The lumbermen went out in the wilderness when the snow was deep and the cold

most severe. It was hard work to fell even one tree, and to hew down a forest such as this they must have been out in the open many weeks.

‘They have to be hardy men to mow a field of this kind,’ he said.

When the eagle had taken two more wing strokes, they sighted a log cabin at the edge of the clearing. It had no windows and only two loose boards for a door. The roof had been covered with bark and twigs, but now it was gaping, and Nils could see that inside the cabin there were only a few big stones to serve as a fire-place, and two board benches. When they were above the cabin the eagle suspected that the boy was wondering who could have lived in such a wretched hut as that.

‘The reapers who mowed the forest field lived there,’ the eagle said.

Nils remembered how the reapers in his home had returned from their day’s work cheerful and happy, and how the best his mother had in the larder was always spread for them; while here, after the arduous work of the day, they must rest on hard benches in a cabin that was worse than an outhouse. And what they had to eat he could not imagine.

‘I wonder if there are any harvest festivals for these labourers?’ he questioned.

A little farther on they saw below them a wretchedly bad road winding through the forest. It was narrow and zigzag, hilly and stony, and cut up by brooks in many places. As they flew over it the eagle knew that the boy was wondering what was carted over a road like that.

‘Over this road the harvest was taken to the stack,’ the eagle said.

Nils remembered what fun they had at home when



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‘HERE THE HARVEST HAS BEEN STACKED,’ THE EAGLE TOLD HIM

the harvest wagons, drawn by two sturdy horses, carried the grain from the field. The man who drove sat proudly on top of the load; the horses danced and pricked up their ears, while the village children, who were allowed to climb upon the sheaves, sat there laughing and shrieking, half pleased, half frightened. But here the great logs were drawn up and down steep hills; here the poor horses must be worked to their limit, and the driver must often be in despair. 'I'm afraid there has been very little cheer along this road,' the boy thought.

The eagle flew on with powerful wing strokes, and soon they came to a river bank covered with logs, chips, and bark. The eagle perceived that the boy wondered why it looked so littered up down there.

'Here the harvest has been stacked,' the eagle told him.

Nils thought how the grain stacks in his part of the country were piled up close to the farms, as if they were their greatest ornaments, while here the harvest was borne to a desolate river strand, and left there.

'I wonder if any one out in this wilderness counts his stacks and compares them with his neighbour's?' he said.

A little later they came to Ljungan, a river which glides through a broad valley. Immediately everything was so changed that they might well think they had come to another country. The dark spruce forest had stopped on the slopes above the valley, which were clad in light-stemmed birches and aspens. The valley was so broad that in many places the river widened into lakes. Along the shores was rich, cultivated country with a great number of large, well-built farms.

As they soared above the valley the eagle realized that the boy was wondering if the fields and meadows here could provide a livelihood for so many people.

'Here live the reapers who mow the forest fields,' the eagle said.

The boy was thinking of the lowly cabins and the hedged-in farms down in Skåne when he exclaimed:

'Why, here the peasants live in real manors. It looks as if it might be worth one's while to work in the forest!'

The eagle had intended to travel due north, but when he had flown out over the river he understood that Nils wondered who handled the timber after it was stacked on the river bank.

Nils remembered how careful they had been at home never to let a grain be wasted, while here were great rafts of logs floating down the river, uncared for. He could not believe that more than half of the logs ever reached their destination. Many were floating in mid-stream, and for them all went smoothly; others moved close to the shore, bumping against points of land, and some were left behind in the still waters of the creeks. On the lakes there were so many logs that they covered the entire surface of the water. These appeared to be lodged for an indefinite period. At the bridges they stuck; in the falls they were bunched, then they were pyramided and broken in two; afterward, in the rapids, they were blocked by the stones and massed into great heaps.

'I wonder how long it takes for this harvest to get to the mill?' said the boy.

The eagle continued his slow flight down River Ljungan. Over many places he paused in the air on outspread wings, that Nils might see how this kind of harvest work was done.

Presently they came to a place where the loggers were at work. The eagle saw that the boy wondered what they were doing.

‘They are the ones who take care of all the late harvest,’ the eagle said.

Nils remembered how peacefully his people at home had driven their grain to the mill. Here the men ran alongside the shores with long boat-hooks, and with toil and effort urged the logs along. They waded out in the river and were soaked from top to toe. They jumped from stone to stone far out into the rapids, and they tramped on the rolling log heaps as calmly as though they were on flat ground. They were daring and resolute men.

‘As I watch this, I’m reminded of the iron-moulders in the mining districts, who juggle with fire as if it were perfectly harmless,’ said the boy. ‘These loggers play with water as if they were its masters. They seem to rule it so that it dare not harm them.’

Gradually they neared the mouth of the river, and the Gulf of Bothnia was beyond them. Gorgo flew no farther straight ahead, but went northward along the coast. Before they had travelled very far they saw a lumber camp as large as a small city. While the eagle circled back and forth above it, he heard the boy remark that this place looked interesting.

‘Here you have the great sawmill called Svartvik,’ the eagle said.

Nils thought of the mill at home, which stood peacefully embedded in foliage, and moved its wings very slowly. This mill, where they grind the forest harvest, stood on the water.

The mill-pond was crowded with logs. One by one they were dragged with iron chains along a sloping bridge into a house which looked like a big barn. What happened to the logs inside the boy could not see, but he heard loud buzzing and roaring, and from the other

end of the house small cars ran out loaded with white planks. The cars ran on shining tracks down to the lumber yard where the planks were piled in rows, forming streets—like blocks of houses in a city. In one place they were building new piles, in another they were pulling down old ones. These were carried aboard two large vessels which lay waiting for cargo. The place was alive with workmen, and in the woods behind the yard they had their homes.

‘They’ll soon manage to saw up all the forests in Medelpad the way they work here,’ said Nils.

The eagle moved his wings just a little, and carried the boy above another large camp, very much like the first, with the mill, yard, wharf, and the homes of the workmen.

‘This is called Kubikenborg,’ the eagle said.

He flapped his wings slowly, flew past two big sawmills, and approached a large city. When the eagle heard the boy ask the name of it, he cried: ‘This is Sundsvall, the capital of the lumber districts.’

‘This must be both a wealthy and powerful city,’ said the boy. ‘Can it be possible that the poor forest soil is the source of all this?’

The eagle flapped his wings again, and went over to Alnön Island, which lies opposite Sundsvall. The boy was greatly surprised to see all the sawmills that decked the shores. On Alnön Island they stood, one next another, and on the mainland opposite were mill upon mill, lumber yard upon lumber yard. He counted forty at least, but believed there were many more.

‘How wonderful it all looks from up here!’ he marvelled. ‘So much life and activity I have not seen in any place save this on the whole trip. What a great country we have! Wherever I go there is always something for people to live upon.’

PART TWELVE

A MORNING IN ÅNGERMANLAND

THE BREAD

NEXT morning, when the eagle had flown some distance into Ångermanland, he remarked that to-day he was the one who was hungry, and must find something to eat. He set Nils down in an enormous pine on a high mountain ridge, and away he flew.

The boy found a comfortable seat in a cleft branch from which he could look down over Ångermanland. It was a glorious morning. The sunshine gilded the tree-tops; a soft breeze played in the pine-needles; the sweetest fragrance was wafted through the forest; a beautiful landscape spread before him; and the boy himself was happy and care free. He felt that no one could be better off.

He had a perfect view in every direction. The country west of him was all peaks and ridges, and the farther away they were the higher and wilder they looked. To the east there were also many peaks, but these sank lower and lower toward the sea, where the land became perfectly flat. Everywhere he saw shining rivers and brooks, which were having a troublesome journey with rapids and falls so long as they ran between mountains, but spread out clear and broad as they neared the shore of the coast. Along the coast the Gulf of Bothnia was dotted with islands and notched with points, but farther out it was smooth and blue like a summer sky.

When Nils had had enough of the landscape he

unloosed his knapsack, took out a morsel of fine white bread, and began to eat.

‘I don’t think I’ve ever tasted such good bread,’ said he. ‘And what a lot I have left! There’s enough to last me for a couple of days.’ As he munched he thought of how he had come by the bread.

‘It must be because I got it in such a nice way that it tastes so good to me,’ he said.

The golden eagle had left Medelpad the evening before. He had hardly crossed the border into Ångermanland when Nils caught a glimpse of a fertile valley and a river, which surpassed anything of the kind he had seen before.

As he glanced down at the rich valley, he complained of feeling hungry. He had had no food for two whole days, he said, and now he was famished. Gorgo did not wish to have it said that Nils had fared worse in his company than when he travelled with the wild geese, so he slackened his speed.

‘Why haven’t you spoken of this before?’ he asked. ‘You shall have all the food you want. There’s no need for you to starve when you have an eagle for a travelling companion.’

Just then the eagle sighted a farmer who was sowing a field near the river strand. The man carried the seeds in a basket hung from his neck, and each time that it was emptied he refilled it from a seed sack which stood at the end of the furrow. The eagle concluded that the sack must be filled with the best food that the boy could wish for, so he darted toward it. But before the bird could get there a terrible clamour arose about him. Sparrows, crows, and swallows came rushing up with wild shrieks, thinking that the eagle meant to swoop down upon some bird.

'Away, away, robber! Away, away, bird-killer!' they cried. They made such a racket that it attracted the farmer, who came running, so that Gorgo had to flee, and the boy got no seed.

The small birds behaved in the most extraordinary manner. Not only did they force the eagle to flee, they pursued him a long distance down the valley, and everywhere the people heard their cries. Women came out and clapped their hands so that it sounded like a volley of musketry, and the men rushed out with rifles.

The same thing was repeated every time the eagle swept toward the ground. The boy abandoned the hope that the eagle could procure any food for him. It had never occurred to him before that Gorgo was so much hated. He almost pitied him.

In a little while they came to a homestead where the housewife had just been baking. She had set a platter of sugared buns in the back yard to cool and was standing beside it, watching, so that the cat and dog should not steal the buns.

The eagle circled down to the yard, but dared not alight right under the eyes of the peasant woman. He flew up and down, irresolute; twice he came down as far as the chimney, then rose again.

The peasant woman noticed the eagle. She raised her head and followed him with her glance.

'How peculiarly he acts!' she remarked. 'I believe he wants one of my buns.'

She was a beautiful woman, tall and fair, with a cheery, open countenance. Laughing heartily, she took a bun from the platter and held it above her head.

'If you want it come and take it!' she challenged.

While the eagle did not understand her language, he knew at once that she was offering him the bun. With

lightning speed he swooped to the bread, snatched it, and flew toward the heights.

When the boy saw the eagle snatch the bread he wept for joy—not because he would escape suffering hunger for a few days, but because he was touched by the peasant woman's sharing her bread with a savage bird of prey.

Where he now sat on the pine branch he could recall at will the tall, fair woman as she stood in the yard and held up the bread.

She must have known that the large bird was a golden eagle—a plunderer, who was usually welcomed with loud shots; doubtless she had also seen the queer changing he bore on his back. But she had not thought of what they were. As soon as she understood that they were hungry she shared her good bread with them.

'If I ever become human again,' thought the boy, 'I shall look up the pretty woman who lives near the great river and thank her for her kindness to us.'

THE FOREST FIRE

While the boy was still at his breakfast he smelled a faint odour of smoke coming from the north. He turned and saw a tiny spiral, white as a mist, rise from a forest ridge—not from the one nearest him, but from the one beyond it. It looked strange to see smoke in the wild forest, but it might be that a mountain stock farm lay over yonder, and the women were boiling their morning coffee.

It was remarkable the way that smoke increased and spread. It could not come from a farm, but perhaps there were charcoal kilns in the forest.

The smoke increased every moment. Now it curled

over the whole mountain top. It was not possible that so much smoke could come from a charcoal kiln. There must be a conflagration of some sort, for many birds flew over to the nearest ridge. Hawks, grouse, and other birds who were so small that it was impossible to recognize them at such a distance, fled from the fire.

The tiny white spiral of smoke grew to a thick white cloud which rolled over the edge of the ridge and sank toward the valley. Sparks and flakes of soot shot up from the clouds, and here and there one could see a red flame in the smoke. A big fire was raging over there, but what was burning? Surely there was no large farm hidden in the forest.

The source of such a fire must be more than a farm. Now the smoke came not only from the ridge but from the valley below it, which the boy could not see, because the next ridge obstructed his view. Great clouds of smoke ascended; the forest itself was burning!

It was difficult for him to grasp the idea that the fresh, green pines could burn. If it really were the forest that was burning, perhaps the fire might spread all the way over to him. It seemed improbable; but he wished the eagle would soon return. It would be best to be away from this. The mere smell of the smoke which he drew in with every breath was a torture.

All at once he heard a terrible crackling and sputtering. It came from the ridge nearest him. There on the highest point stood a tall pine like the one in which he sat. A moment before it had been a gorgeous red in the morning light. Now all the needles flashed and the pine caught fire. Never before had it looked so beautiful! But this was the last time it could exhibit any beauty, for the pine was the first tree on the ridge to burn. It was impossible to tell how the flames had

reached it. Had the fire flown on red wings or crawled along the ground like a snake? It was not easy to say, but there it was at all events. The great pine burned like a heap of dry twigs.

Ah, look! Now smoke curled up in many places on the ridge. The forest fire was both bird and snake. It could fly in the air over wide stretches, or steal along the ground. The whole ridge was ablaze!

There was a hasty flight of birds that circled up through the smoke like big flakes of soot. They flew across the valley and came to the ridge where the boy sat. A horned owl perched beside him, and on a branch just above him a hen hawk alighted. These would have been dangerous neighbours at any other time, but now they did not even glance in his direction—only stared at the fire. Probably they could not make out what was wrong with the forest. A marten ran up the pine to the tip of a branch and looked at the burning heights. Close beside the marten sat a squirrel, but they did not appear to notice each other.

Now the fire came rushing down the slope, hissing and roaring like a tornado. Through the smoke one could see the flames dart from tree to tree. Before a branch caught fire it was first enveloped in a thin veil of smoke, then all the needles grew red at one time, and it began to crackle and blaze.

In the glen below ran a little brook, bordered by alder-trees and small birches. It appeared as if the flames would halt there. Leafy trees are not so ready to take fire as fir-trees. The fire did pause as if before a gate that could stop it. It glowed and crackled and tried to leap across the brook to the pine woods on the other side but could not reach them.

For a short time the fire was thus restrained, then it

shot a long flame over to the large dry pine that stood on the slope, and this was soon ablaze. The fire had crossed the brook. The heat was so intense that every tree on the mountain was ready to burn. With the roar and rush of the maddest storm and the wildest torrent the forest fire flew over to the ridge.



Then the hawk and the owl rose and the marten dashed down the tree. In a few seconds more the fire would reach the top of the pine. The boy too would have to be moving. It was not easy to slide down the long, straight pine trunk. He took as firm a hold of it as he could and slid in long stretches between the knotty branches; finally he tumbled headlong to the ground. He had no time to find out if he was hurt—only to hurry away. The fire raced down the pine like a raging tempest; the ground under his feet was hot and smouldering.

On either side of him ran a lynx and an adder, and right beside the snake fluttered a mother grouse who was hurrying along with her little downy chicks.

When the refugees descended the mountain to the glen they met people fighting the fire. They had been there for some time, but the boy had been gazing so intently in the direction of the fire that he had not noticed them before.

In this glen there was also a brook, bordered by a row of leafy trees, and behind these trees the people worked. They felled the fir-trees nearest the alders, dipped water from the brook and poured it over the ground, washing away heather and bog-myrtle to prevent the fire from stealing up through the brush.

They too thought only of the fire which was now rushing toward them. The fleeing animals ran in and out among the men's feet without attracting attention. No one struck at the adder or tried to catch the mother grouse as she ran back and forth with her little peeping birdlings. They did not even bother about Nils. In their hands they held great pine branches which they had dipped into the brook, and it appeared as if they intended to challenge the fire with these weapons. There were not many men, and it was strange to see them stand there, ready to fight, when all other living creatures were fleeing.

As the fire came roaring and rushing down the slope with its intolerable heat and suffocating smoke, ready to hurl itself over brook and leaf-tree wall in order to reach the opposite shore without having to pause, the people drew back at first as if unable to withstand it; but they did not flee far before they turned back.

The conflagration raged with savage force, sparks poured like a rain of fire over the leafy trees, and long

tongues of flame shot hissing out from the smoke, as if the forest on the other side were sucking them in.

But the leaf-tree wall was an obstruction behind which the men worked. When the ground began to smoulder they brought water in their vessels and dampened it. When a tree became wreathed in smoke they felled it at once, threw it down, and put out the flames. Where the fire crept along the heather they beat it with the wet pine branches and smothered it.

The smoke was so dense that it enveloped everything. One could not possibly see how the battle was going, but it was easy enough to understand that it was a hard fight, and that several times the fire came near penetrating farther.

After a while the loud roar of the flames decreased, and the smoke cleared. By that time the leafy trees had lost all their foliage, the ground under them was charred, the men were blackened by smoke and dripping with sweat; but the forest fire was conquered. It had ceased to flame up. Soft white smoke crept along the ground, and from it peeped out a lot of black stumps. This was all there was left of the beautiful forest.

The boy scrambled up on a rock so that he might see how the fire had been quenched. But now that the forest was saved his peril began. The owl and the hawk simultaneously turned their eyes toward him. Just then he heard a familiar voice calling to him.

Gorgo, the golden eagle, came sweeping through the forest, and soon the boy was soaring among the clouds —rescued from every peril.

PART THIRTEEN

VÄSTERBOTTEN AND LAPLAND

THE FIVE SCOUTS

ONCE, at Skansen, Nils had sat under the steps at Bollnäs cottage and had overheard Clement Larsson and the old Laplander talk about Norrland. Both agreed that it was the most beautiful part of Sweden. Clement thought that the southern part was the best, while the Laplander favoured the northern part.

As they argued it became plain that Clement had never been farther north than Härnösand. The Laplander laughed at him for speaking with such assurance of places that he had never seen.

‘I think I shall have to tell you a story, Clement, to give you some idea of Lapland, since you have not seen it,’ he said.

‘It shall not be said of me that I refuse to listen to a story,’ retorted Clement, and the old Laplander began:

‘It once happened that the birds who lived down in Sweden, south of the great Lapland, thought that they were overcrowded there and suggested moving northward.

‘They came together to consider the matter. The young and eager birds wished to start at once but the older and wiser ones passed a resolution to send scouts to explore the new country.

‘“Let each of the five great bird families send out a scout,” said the old and wise birds, “to learn if there is room for us all up there—food and hiding-places.”’

‘Five intelligent and capable birds were immediately appointed by the five great bird families.

‘The forest birds selected a grouse, the field birds a lark, the sea birds a gull, the fresh-water birds a loon, and the cliff birds a snow-bunting.

‘When the five chosen ones were ready to start, the grouse, who was the largest and most commanding, said :

““There are great stretches of land ahead. If we travel together, it will be long before we cover all the territory that we must explore. If, on the other hand, we travel singly—each one exploring his special portion of the country—we can finish the whole business in a few days.”

‘The other scouts thought the suggestion a good one, and agreed to act upon it.

‘It was decided that the grouse should explore the midlands. The lark was to travel to the eastward, the sea gull still farther east, where the land bordered on the sea, while the loon should fly over the territory west of the midlands, and the snow-bunting to the extreme west.

‘In accordance with this plan the five birds flew over the whole Northland. Then they turned back and told the assembly of birds what they had discovered.

‘The gull, who had travelled along the sea-coast, spoke first.

““The north is a fine country,” he said. “The sounds are full of fish, and there are points and islands without number. Most of these are uninhabited, and the birds will find plenty of room there. The humans do a little fishing and sailing in the sounds, but not enough to disturb the birds. If the sea birds follow my advice they will move north immediately.”

‘When the gull had finished, the lark, who had explored the land back from the coast, spoke.

“I don’t know what the gull means by his islands and points,” he said. “I have travelled only over great fields and flowery meadows. I have never before seen a country crossed by so many large streams. Their shores are dotted with homesteads, and at the mouths of the rivers are cities; but for the most part the country is very desolate. If the field birds follow my advice they will move north immediately.”

‘After the lark came the grouse, who had flown over the midlands.

“I know neither what the lark means with his meadows nor the gull with his islands and points,” said he. “I have seen only pine forests on this whole trip. There are also many rushing streams and great stretches of moss-grown swamp land; but all that is not river or swamp is forest. If the forest birds follow my advice they will move north immediately.”

‘After the grouse came the loon, who had explored the borderland to the west.

“I don’t know what the grouse means by his forests, nor do I know where the eyes of the lark and the gull could have been,” said the loon. “There’s hardly any land up there—only big lakes. Between beautiful shores glisten clear, blue mountain lakes, which pour into roaring water-falls. If the fresh-water birds follow my advice they will move north immediately.”

‘The last speaker was the snow bunting, who had flown along the western boundary.

“I don’t know what the loon means by his lakes, nor do I know what countries the grouse, the lark, and the gull can have seen,” he said. “I found one vast mountainous region up north. I didn’t run across any fields

or any pine forests, but peak after peak and highlands. I have seen ice-fields and snow and mountain brooks, with water as white as milk. No farmers nor cattle nor homesteads have I seen, but only Lapps and reindeer and huts met my eyes. If the cliff birds follow my advice they will move north immediately.”

‘When the five scouts had presented their reports to the assembly, they began to call one another liars, and were ready to fly at each other to prove the truth of their arguments.

‘But the old and wise birds who had sent them out listened to their accounts with joy, and calmed them down.

““You mustn’t quarrel among yourselves,” they said. “We understand from your reports that up north there are large mountain tracts, a big lake region, great forest lands, a wide plain, and a big group of islands. This is more than we have expected—more than many a mighty kingdom can boast within its borders.””

THE MOVING LANDSCAPE

Nils had been reminded of the old Laplander’s story because he himself was now travelling over the country of which he had spoken. The eagle told him that the expanse of coast which spread beneath them was Västerbotten, and that the blue ridges far to the west were in Lapland.

Only to be once more seated comfortably on Gorgo’s back, after all that he had suffered during the forest fire, was a pleasure. Besides, they were having a lovely trip. The flight was so easy that at times it seemed as if they were standing still in the air. The eagle beat and beat his wings, without appearing to move from the spot; on

the other hand, everything under them seemed in motion. The whole earth and all things on it moved slowly southward. The forests, the fields, the fences, the rivers, the cities, the islands, the sawmills—all were on the march. The boy wondered whither they were bound. Had they grown tired of standing so far north, and wished to move toward the south?

There was one thing of which this Northland had more than other lands, and that was light. Night must have set in, for the cranes stood sleeping on the morass; but it was as light as day. The sun had not travelled southward, like every other thing. Instead, it had gone so far north that it shone in the boy's face. To all appearance it had no notion of setting that night.

Nils raised his head and looked around, absolutely bewildered. It was mighty queer! Here he lay sleeping in some place where he had not been before. No, he had never seen this glen nor the mountains round about. He did not know the round lake in the middle of the glen, and never had he noticed such puny and shrunken birches as those under which he now lay.

Where was the eagle? The boy could see no sign of him. Gorgo must have deserted him. Well, here was another adventure!

The boy lay down again, closed his eyes, and tried to remember the circumstances under which he had dropped to sleep.

He remembered that as long as he was travelling over Västerbotten he had fancied that the eagle and he were at a standstill in the air, and that the land under them was moving southward. But then the eagle turned north-west, the wind had come from the side, and again

he had felt a current of air, so that the land below had stopped moving and he had noticed that the eagle was bearing him onward with terrific speed.

‘Now we are flying into Lapland,’ Gorgo had said, and the boy had bent forward, so that he might see the country of which he had heard so much.

But he had felt rather disappointed at not seeing anything but great tracts of forest land and wide marshes. Forest followed marsh and marsh followed forest. The monotony of the whole finally made him so sleepy that he had nearly dropped to the ground.

He said to the eagle that he could not stay on his back another minute, but must sleep awhile. Gorgo had promptly swooped to the ground, where the boy had dropped down on a tuft of moss. But then Gorgo put a talon around him and soared into the air with him again.

‘Go to sleep, Tummetott!’ he cried. ‘The sunshine keeps me awake and I want to continue the journey.’

Although the boy hung in this uncomfortable position, he actually dozed and dreamed.

When he recovered his senses he found himself at the bottom of a ravine.

But where was Gorgo? How was he to find out where he himself was?

He got up and looked all round him. Then he happened to glance upward and saw a peculiar structure of pine twigs and branches that stood on a cliff-ledge.

‘That must be one of those eagle nests that Gorgo——,’ But this was as far as he got. He tore off his cap, waved it in the air, and cheered.

Now he understood where Gorgo had brought him. This was the very glen where the wild geese lived in summer, and just above it was the eagles’ cliff.

HE HAD ARRIVED.

He would meet Morten Gander and Akka and all his other friends in a few moments. Hurrah!

THE MEETING

All was still in the glen. The sun had not yet risen above the cliffs, and Nils knew that it was too early in the morning for the geese to be awake.

He walked along leisurely and searched for his friends. Before he had gone very far he paused with a smile, for he saw such a pretty sight. A wild goose was sleeping in a neat little nest, and beside her stood her gander. He too slept, but it was obvious that he had stationed himself thus near her that he might be on hand in the possible event of danger.

The boy went on without disturbing them and peeped into the willow brush that covered the ground. It was not long before he saw another goose couple. These were strangers, not of his flock, but he was so happy that he began to hum—just because he had come across wild geese.

He peeped into another bit of brushwood. There at last he saw two that were familiar.

It was certainly Neljä that was nesting there, and the gander who stood beside her was surely Kolme. Why, of course!

The boy had a good mind to awaken them, but he let them sleep on, and walked away.

In the next brush he saw Viisi and Kuusi, and not far from them he found Yksi and Kaksi. All four were asleep, and the boy passed by without disturbing them. As he approached the next brush, he thought he saw something white shimmering among the bushes, and his

heart thumped with joy. Yes, it was as he expected. In there sat the dainty Dunfin on an egg-filled nest. Beside her stood her white gander. Although he slept, it was easy to see how proud he was to watch over his wife up here among the Lapland mountains. The boy did not want to waken the gander so he walked on.

He had to seek a long time before he came across any more wild geese. Finally he saw on a little hillock something that resembled a small, grey tuft of moss, and he knew that there was Akka from Kebnekaise. She stood, wide awake, looking about as if she were keeping watch over the whole glen.

‘Good morning, Mother Akka !’ said the boy. ‘Please don’t waken the other geese yet awhile, for I wish to speak with you alone.’

The old leader-goose came rushing down the hill and up to the boy.

First she seized hold of him and shook him, then she stroked him with her bill before she shook him again. But she did not say a word, since he asked her not to waken the others.

Nils kissed old Mother Akka on both cheeks, then he told her how he had been carried off to Skansen and held captive there.

‘Now I must tell you that Smirre Fox, short of an ear, sat imprisoned in the foxes’ cage at Skansen,’ said the boy. ‘Although he was very mean to us, I couldn’t help feeling sorry for him. There were many other foxes in the cage; and they seemed quite contented there, but Smirre sat all the while looking dejected, longing for liberty.

‘I made many good friends at Skansen, and I learned one day from the Lapp dog that a man had come to Skansen to buy foxes. He was from some island out far

in the sea. All the foxes had been exterminated there, and the rats were about to get the better of the inhabitants, so they wished the foxes back again.

‘As soon as I learned of this, I went to Smirre’s cage and said to him :

“To-morrow some men are coming here to get a pair of foxes. Don’t hide, Smirre, but keep well in the foreground and see to it that you are chosen. Then you’ll be free again.”

‘He followed my suggestion, and now he is running at large on the island. What say you to this, Mother Akka? If you had been in my place, would you not have done likewise?’

‘You have acted in a way that makes me wish I had done that myself,’ said the leader-goose proudly.

‘It’s a relief to know that you approve,’ said the boy. ‘Now there is one thing more I wish to ask you about.

‘One day I happened to see Gorgo, the eagle—the one that fought with Morten Gander—a prisoner at Skansen. He was in the eagles’ cage and looked pitifully forlorn. I was thinking of filing down the wire roof over him and letting him out, but I also thought of his being a dangerous robber and bird-eater, and wondered if I should be doing right in letting loose such a plunderer, and if it were not better, perhaps, to let him stay where he was. What say you, Mother Akka? Was it right to think thus?’

‘No, it was not right!’ retorted Akka. ‘Say what you will about the eagles they are proud birds and greater lovers of freedom than all others. It is not right to keep them in captivity. Do you know what I would suggest? This: that, as soon as you are well rested, we two make the trip together to the big bird prison and liberate Gorgo.’

‘That is just what I was expecting you to say, Mother Akka,’ returned the boy eagerly. ‘There are those who say that you no longer have any love in your heart for the one you reared so tenderly, because he lives as eagles must live. But I know now that it isn’t true. And now I want to see if Morten Gander is awake. Meanwhile, if you wish to say a “thank you” to the one who brought me here to you, I think you’ll find him up there on the cliff ledge, where once you found a helpless eaglet.’

PART FOURTEEN

OSA, THE GOOSE GIRL, AND LITTLE MATS

THE YEAR that Nils Holgersson travelled with the wild geese everybody was talking about two little children, a boy and a girl, who tramped through the country. They were from Sunnerbo township, in Småland, and had once lived with their parents and four brothers and sisters in a little cottage on the heath.

While the two children, Osa and Mats, were still small, a poor, homeless woman came to their cottage one night and begged for shelter. Although the place could hardly hold the family, she was taken in and the mother spread a bed for her on the floor. In the night she coughed so badly that the children fancied the house shook. By morning she was too ill to continue her wanderings.

She told them that the last few years she had roamed about with a band of gipsies. She herself was not of gipsy blood but was the daughter of a well-to-do farmer. She had run away from home and gone with the nomads. She believed that a gipsy woman who was angry with her had brought this sickness upon her. Nor was that all: the gipsy woman had also cursed her, saying that all who took her under their roof or were kind to her should suffer a like fate. She believed this, and therefore begged them to cast her out of the house and never to see her again. She did not want to bring misfortune down upon such good people. But the peasants refused to do her bidding. It was quite possible that they were alarmed, but they were not the kind of people who could turn out a poor, sick person.

Soon after that she died, and then along came the misfortunes. Before, there had never been anything but happiness in that cottage. Its inmates were poor, yet not so very poor. The father was a maker of weavers' combs, and mother and children helped him with the work. Father made the frames, mother and the older children did the binding, while the smaller ones planed the teeth and cut them out. They worked from morning until night but the time passed pleasantly, especially when father talked of the days when he travelled about in foreign lands and sold weavers' combs. Father was so jolly that sometimes mother and the children would laugh until their sides ached at his funny quips and jokes.

The weeks following the death of the poor vagabond woman lingered in the minds of the children like a horrible nightmare. One after another they lost their brothers and sisters. At last it was very still and sad in the cottage.

A few days later the eldest was stricken. She had always been the father's favourite, so when he realized that she too must go, he fled from all the misery.

After the father went away they became very poor. For a while he sent them money, but afterward things must have gone badly with him, for no more came.

The mother closed the cottage and left home with the two remaining children, Osa and Mats. She went down to Skåne to work in the beet fields and found a place at the Jordberga sugar refinery. She was a good worker and had a cheerful and generous nature. Everybody liked her. Many were astonished because she could be so calm after all that she had passed through, but the mother was very strong and patient.

But the sickness came upon herself. She had gone to Skåne in the beginning of summer; before autumn she was gone, and the children were left alone.

While their mother was ill she had often said to the children they must remember that she never regretted having let the sick woman stop with them. It was not hard to die when one had done right, she said, for then one could go with a clear conscience.

Before the mother passed away she tried to make some provision for her children. She asked the people with whom she lived to let them remain in the room which she had occupied. If the children only had a shelter they would not become a burden to any one. She knew that they could take care of themselves.

Osa and Mats were allowed to keep the room on condition that they would tend the geese, as it was always hard to find children willing to do that work. It turned out as the mother expected: they did maintain themselves. The girl made candy, and the boy carved wooden toys, which they sold at the farmhouses. They had a talent for trading and soon began buying eggs and butter from the farmers, which they sold to the workers at the sugar refinery. Osa was the older, and by the time she was thirteen she was as responsible as a grown woman. She was quiet and serious, while Mats was lively and talkative. His sister used to say to him that he could outcackle the geese.

When the children had been at Jordberga for two years, there was a lecture given one evening at the schoolhouse. Evidently it was meant for grown-ups, but the two Småland children were in the audience. They did not regard themselves as children, and few persons thought of them as such. The lecturer talked about the dread disease called tuberculosis, which every year carried off so many people in Sweden. He spoke very plainly and the children understood every word.

After the lecture they waited outside the schoolhouse.

When the lecturer came out they took hands and walked gravely up to him, asking if they might speak to him.

The stranger must have wondered at the two rosy, baby-faced children standing there talking with an earnestness more in keeping with people thrice their age; but he listened kindly to them. They related what had happened in their home, and asked the lecturer if he thought their mother and their sisters and brothers had died of the sickness he had described.

‘Very likely,’ he answered. ‘It could hardly have been any other disease.’

If only the mother and father had known what the children learned that evening they might have protected themselves.

Osa and Mats waited awhile before putting the next question, for that was the most important of all. It was not true then that the gipsy woman had sent the sickness because they had befriended the one with whom she was angry? It was not something special that had stricken only them? The lecturer assured them that no person had the power to bring sickness upon another in that way.

Thereupon the children thanked him and went to their room. They talked until late that night.

The next day they gave notice that they could not tend geese another year, but must go elsewhere. Where were they going? Why, to try to find their father. They must tell him that their mother and the other children had died of a common ailment and not something special brought upon them by an angry person. They were very glad that they had found out about this. Now it was their duty to tell their father of it, for probably he was still trying to solve the mystery.

Osa and Mats set out for their old home on the heath.

When they arrived they were shocked to find the little cottage in flames. They went to the parsonage and there they learned that a railway workman had seen their father at Malmberget, far up in Lapland. He had been working in a mine and possibly was still there. When the clergyman heard that the children wanted to go in search of their father he brought out a map and showed them how far it was to Malmberget and tried to dissuade them from making the journey, but the children insisted that they must find their father. He had left home believing something that was not true. They must find him and tell him that it was all a mistake.

They did not want to spend their little savings buying railway tickets, therefore they decided to go all the way on foot, which they never regretted, as it proved to be a remarkably beautiful journey.

Before they were out of Småland, they stopped at a farmhouse to buy food. The housewife was a kind, motherly soul who took an interest in the children. She asked them who they were and where they came from, and they told her their story. 'Dear, dear! Dear, dear!' she interpolated time and again when they were speaking. Later she petted the children and stuffed them with all kinds of good things, for which she would not accept a penny. When they rose to thank her and go, the woman asked them to stop at her brother's farm in the next township. Of course the children were delighted.

'Give him my greetings and tell him what has happened to you,' said the peasant woman.

This the children did and were well treated. From every farm after that it was always: 'If you happen to go in such and such a direction, stop there or there and tell them what has happened to you.'

In every farmhouse to which they were sent there was always a sick person. So Osa and Mats went through the country unconsciously teaching the people how to combat the dreadful disease.

One day, while still in Lapland, Akka took Nils to Malmberget, where they discovered little Mats lying unconscious at the mouth of the pit. He and Osa had arrived there a short time before. That morning he had been roaming about, hoping to come across his father. He had ventured too near the shaft and been hurt by flying rocks after the setting off of a blast.

Nils ran to the edge of the shaft and called down to the miners that a little boy was injured.

Immediately a number of labourers came rushing up to little Mats. Two of them carried him to the hut where he and Osa were staying. They did all they could to save him, but it was too late.

Nils felt so sorry for poor Osa. He wanted to help and comfort her; but he knew that if he were to go to her now he would only frighten her—such as he was!

The night after the burial of little Mats, Osa straightway shut herself in her hut.

She sat alone recalling, one after another, things her brother had said and done. There was so much to think about that she did not go straight to bed but sat up most of the night. The more she thought of her brother the more she realized how hard it would be to live without him. At last she dropped her head on the table and wept.

‘What shall I do now that little Mats is gone?’ she sobbed.

It was nearly morning and Osa, spent by the strain of her hard day, finally fell asleep.

She dreamed that little Mats softly opened the door and stepped into the room.

‘Osa, you must go and find father,’ he said.

‘How can I when I don’t even know where he is?’ she replied in her dream.

‘Don’t worry about that,’ returned little Mats in his usual cheery way. ‘I’ll send someone to help you.’

Just as Osa, the goose girl, dreamed that little Mats had said this there was a knock at the door. It was a real knock—not something she heard in the dream, but she was so held by the dream that she could not tell the real from the unreal. As she went on to open the door she thought:

‘This must be the person little Mats promised to send me.’

She was right, for it was Nils come to talk to her about her father.

When he saw that she was not afraid of him he told her in a few words where her father was and how to reach him.

While he was speaking Osa, the goose girl, gradually regained consciousness; when he had finished she was wide awake.

Then she was so terrified at the thought of talking with an elf that she could not say thank you or anything else, but quickly shut the door.

As she did that she thought she saw an expression of pain flash across the elf’s face, but she could not help what she did, for she was beside herself with fright. She crept into bed as quickly as she could and drew the covers over her head.

Although she was afraid of the elf she had a feeling that he meant well by her. So the next day she made haste to do as he had told her.

PART FIFTEEN

WITH THE LAPLANDERS

ONE afternoon in July it rained frightfully up around Lake Luossajaure. The Laplanders, who lived mostly in the open during the summer, had crawled under the tent and were squatting round the fire drinking coffee.

The new settlers on the east shore of the lake worked diligently to have their homes in readiness before the severe Arctic winter set in. They wondered at the Laplanders, who had lived in the far north for centuries without even thinking that better protection was needed against cold and storm than a thin tent covering.

The Laplanders, on the other hand, wondered at the new settlers giving themselves so much needless hard work, when nothing more was necessary to live comfortably than a few reindeer and a tent.

They only had to drive the poles into the ground and spread the covers over them, and their abodes were ready. They did not have to trouble themselves about decorating or furnishing. The principal thing was to scatter some spruce twigs on the floor, spread a few skins, and hang the big kettle, in which they cooked their reindeer meat, on a chain suspended from the top of the tent poles.

While the Laplanders were chatting over their coffee cups, a rowing boat coming from the Kiruna side pulled ashore at the Lapps' quarters.

A workman and a young girl, between thirteen and fourteen, stepped from the boat. The girl was Osa.

The Lapp dogs bounded down to them, barking loudly, and a Lapp poked his head out of the tent opening to see what was going on.

He was glad when he saw the workman, for he was a friend of the Laplanders—a kindly and sociable man, who could speak their native tongue. The Lapp called to him to crawl under the tent.

‘You’re just in time, Söderberg!’ he said. ‘The coffee-pot is on the fire. No one can do any work in this rain so come in and tell us the news.’

The workman went in, and, with much ado and amid a great deal of laughter and joking, places were made for Söderberg and Osa, though the tent was already crowded to the limit with people. Osa understood none of the conversation. She sat silent and looked in wonderment at the kettle and coffee-pot; at the fire and smoke; at the Lapp men and Lapp women; at the children and dogs; the walls and floor; the coffee cups and tobacco pipes; the multi-coloured costumes and crude implements. All this was new to her.

Suddenly she lowered her eyes, conscious that every one in the tent was looking at her. Söderberg must have said something about her, for now both Lapp men and Lapp women took the short pipes from their mouths and stared at her in open-eyed wonder and awe. The Laplander at her side patted her shoulder and nodded, saying in Swedish, ‘bra, bra!’ (good, good!). A Lapp woman filled a cup to the brim with coffee and passed it under difficulties, while a Lapp boy, who was about her own age, wriggled and crawled between them all over to her.

Osa felt that Söderberg was telling the Laplanders that she had just buried her little brother, Mats. She wished he would find out about her father instead.

The elf had said that he lived with the Lapps, who camped west of Lake Luossajaure, and she had begged leave to ride up on a sand train to seek him, as no regular passenger trains came so far. Both labourers and foremen had helped her as best they could. An engineer had sent Söderberg across the lake with her, as he spoke Lappish. She had hoped to meet her father as soon as she arrived. Her glance wandered anxiously from face to face, but she saw only Lapps. Her father was not there.

She noticed that the Lapps and the Swede, Söderberg, grew more and more earnest as they talked among themselves. The Lapps shook their heads and tapped their foreheads, as if they were speaking of someone that was not quite right in his mind.

She became so uneasy that she could no longer endure the suspense and asked Söderberg what the Laplanders knew of her father.

‘They say he has gone fishing,’ said the workman. ‘They’re not sure that he can get back to the camp to-night; but as soon as the weather clears one of them will go in search of him.’

Thereupon he turned to the Lapps and went on talking to them. He did not wish to give Osa an opportunity to question him further about Jon Assarsson.

THE NEXT MORNING

Ola Serka himself, who was the most distinguished man among the Lapps, had said that he would find Osa’s father, but he appeared to be in no haste and sat huddled outside the tent, thinking of Jon Assarsson and wondering how best to tell him of his daughter’s arrival. It would require diplomacy in order that Jon Assarsson

might not become alarmed and flee. He was an odd sort of man who was afraid of children. He used to say that the sight of them made him so melancholy that he could not endure it.

While Ola Serka deliberated, Osa, the goose girl, and Aslak, the young Lapp boy who had stared so hard at her the night before, sat on the ground in front of the tent and chatted.

Aslak had been to school and could speak Swedish. He was telling Osa about the life of the Lapps, assuring her that they fared better than other people.

Osa thought that they lived wretchedly and told him so.

‘You don’t know what you are talking about!’ said Aslak. ‘Only stop with us a week and you shall see that we are the happiest people on earth.’

‘If I were to stop here a whole week I should be choked by all the smoke in the tent,’ Osa retorted.

‘Don’t say that!’ protested the boy. ‘You know nothing of us. Let me tell you something which will make you understand that the longer you stay with us the more contented you will become. . . . Osa, if you were to stay with us only a month you could never again part from us.’

With these words, Aslak, the Lapp boy, finished his story. Just then his father, Ola Serka, took the pipe from his mouth and rose.

Old Ola understood more Swedish than he was willing to let any one know, and he had overheard his son’s remarks. While he was listening it had suddenly flashed on him how he should handle this delicate matter of telling Jon Assarsson that his daughter had come in search of him.

Ola Serka went down to Lake Luossajaure and had

walked a short distance along the strand when he came upon a man who sat on a rock fishing.

The fisherman was grey-haired and bent. His eyes blinked wearily and there was something slack and helpless about him. He looked like a man who had tried to carry a burden too heavy for him, or to solve a problem too difficult for him, who had become broken and despondent over his failure.

‘You must have had luck with your fishing, Jon, since you’ve been at it all night?’ said the mountaineer in Lappish, as he approached.

The fisherman gave a start, then glanced up. The bait on his hook was gone and not a fish lay on the strand beside him. He hastened to rebait the hook and throw out the line. In the meantime the mountaineer squatted on the grass beside him.

‘There’s a matter that I wanted to talk over with you,’ said Ola. ‘You know that I had a little daughter who died last winter, and we have always missed her in the tent.’

‘Yes, I know,’ said the fisherman abruptly, a cloud passing over his face—as though he disliked being reminded of a dead child.

‘It’s not worth while to spend one’s life grieving,’ said the Laplander.

‘I suppose it isn’t.’

‘Now I’m thinking of adopting another child. Don’t you think it would be a good idea?’

‘That depends on the child, Ola.’

‘I will tell you what I know of the girl,’ said Ola. Then he told the fisherman that around midsummer-time, two strange children—a boy and a girl—had come to the mines to look for their father, but as their father was away, they had stayed to await his

return. While there, the boy had been killed by a blast of rock.

Thereupon Ola gave a beautiful description of how brave the little girl had been, and of how she had won the admiration and sympathy of every one.

‘Is that the girl you want to take into your tent?’ asked the fisherman.

‘Yes,’ returned the Lapp. ‘When we heard her story we were all deeply touched and said among ourselves that so good a sister would also make a good daughter, and we hoped that she would come to us.’

The fisherman sat quietly thinking a moment. It was plain that he continued the conversation only to please his friend the Lapp.

‘I presume the girl is one of your race?’

‘No,’ said Ola, ‘she doesn’t belong to the Lapps.’

‘Perhaps she’s the daughter of some new settler and is accustomed to the life here?’

‘No, she’s from the far south,’ replied Ola, as if this was of small importance.

The fisherman grew more interested.

‘Then I don’t believe that you can take her,’ he said. ‘It’s doubtful if she could stand living in a tent in winter, since she was not brought up that way.’

‘She will find kind parents and kind brothers and sisters in the tent,’ insisted Ola Serka. ‘It’s worse to be alone than to freeze.’

The fisherman became more and more zealous to prevent the adoption. It seemed as if he could not bear the thought of a child of Swedish parents being taken in by Laplanders.

‘You said just now that she had a father in the mine.’

‘He’s dead,’ said the Lapp abruptly.

‘I suppose you have thoroughly investigated this matter, Ola?’

‘What’s the use of going to all that trouble?’ disdained the Lapp. ‘I ought to know! Would the girl and her brother have been obliged to roam about the country if they had a father living? Would two children have been forced to care for themselves if they had a father? The girl herself thinks he’s alive, but I say that he must be dead.’

The man with the tired eyes turned to Ola.

‘What is the girl’s name, Ola?’ he asked.

The mountaineer thought awhile, then said:

‘I can’t remember it. I must ask her.’

‘Ask her! Is she already here?’

‘She’s down at the camp.’

‘What, Ola! Have you taken her in before knowing her father’s wishes?’

‘What do I care for her father! If he isn’t dead, he’s probably the kind of man who cares nothing for his child. He may be glad to have another take her in hand.’

The fisherman threw down his rod and rose with an alertness in his movements that bespoke new life.

‘I don’t think her father can be like other people,’ continued the mountaineer. ‘I dare say he is a man who is haunted by gloomy thoughts and therefore cannot work steadily. What kind of a father would that be for the girl?’

While Ola was talking the fisherman started up the strand.

‘Where are you going?’ queried the Lapp.

‘I’m going to have a look at your foster-daughter, Ola.’

‘Good!’ said the Lapp. ‘Come along and meet her.

I think you'll say that she will be a good daughter to me.'

The Swede rushed on so rapidly that the Laplander could hardly keep pace with him.

After a moment Ola said to his companion :



'Now I recall that her name is Osa—this girl I'm adopting.'

The other man only kept hurrying along, and old Ola Serka was so well pleased that he wanted to laugh aloud.

When they came in sight of the tents, Ola said a few words more.

'She came here to us Lapps to find her father and not to become my foster-child. But if she doesn't find him I shall be glad to keep her in my tent.'

The fisherman hastened all the faster.
'I thought he would be alarmed when I threatened to take his daughter into the Lapps' quarters,' laughed Ola to himself.

When the man from Kiruna, who had brought Osa to the tent, turned back later in the day, he had two people with him in the boat, who sat close together, holding hands—as if they never again wanted to part.

They were Jon Assersson and his daughter. Both were unlike what they had been a few hours earlier.

The father looked less bent and weary and his eyes were clear and good, as if at last he had found the answer to that which had troubled him so long.

Osa, the goose girl, no longer looked about her in a grown-up and watchful way, for she had found someone to care for her, and now she could be a child again.

PART SIXTEEN

HOMEWARD BOUND!

THE BOY sat on the white gander's back and rode up amongst the clouds. Some thirty geese, in regular order, flew rapidly southward. There was a rustling of feathers and the many wings beat the air so noisily that one could scarcely hear one's own voice. Akka from Kebnekaise flew in the lead; after her came Yksi and Kaksi, Kolme and Neljä, Viisi and Kuusi, Morten Gander and Dunfin. The six goslings which had accompanied the flock the autumn before had now left to look after themselves. Instead, the old geese were taking with them twenty-two goslings that had grown up in the glen that summer. Eleven flew to the right, eleven to the left; and they did their best to fly at even distances, like the big birds.

The poor youngsters had never before been on a long trip and at first they had difficulty in keeping up with the rapid flight.

‘Akka from Kebnekaise! Akka from Kebnekaise!’ they cried in plaintive tones.

‘What’s the matter?’ said the leader-goose sharply.

‘Our wings are tired of moving, our wings are tired of moving!’ wailed the young ones.

‘The longer you keep it up, the better it will go,’ answered the leader-goose, without slackening her speed. And she was quite right, for when the goslings had flown two hours longer they complained no more of being tired.

But in the mountain glen they had been in the habit of eating all day long, and very soon they began to feel hungry.

‘Akka, Akka, Akka from Kebnekaise!’ wailed the goslings pitifully.

‘What’s the trouble now?’ asked the leader-goose.

‘We’re so hungry, we can’t fly any more!’ whimpered the goslings. ‘We’re so hungry, we can’t fly any more!’

‘Wild geese must learn to eat air and drink wind,’ said the leader-goose, and kept on flying.

It actually did seem as if the young ones were learning to live on wind and air, for when they had flown a little longer they said nothing more about being hungry.

The goose flock was still in the mountain regions, and the old geese called out the names of all the peaks as they flew past, so that the youngsters might learn them. When they had been calling out a while, ‘This is Porsotjokko, this is Sarjektjokko, this is Sulitelma,’ and so on, the goslings became impatient again.

‘Akka, Akka, Akka!’ they shrieked in heart-rending tones.

‘What’s wrong?’ said the leader-goose.

‘We haven’t room in our heads for any more of those awful names!’ shrieked the goslings.

‘The more you put into your heads the more you can get into them,’ retorted the leader-goose, and continued to call out the queer names.

Nils sat thinking that it was about time the wild geese went southward, for so much snow had fallen that the ground was white as far as the eye could see. It was no use denying that it had been rather disagreeable in the glen toward the end. Rain and fog had succeeded each other without any relief, and even if it did clear up once

in a while, immediately frost set in. Berries and mushrooms, upon which the boy had subsisted during the summer, were either frozen or withered. Finally he had been compelled to eat raw fish, which was something he disliked. The days had grown short, and the long evenings and late mornings were rather tiresome for one who could not sleep the whole time that the sun was away.

Now, at last, the goslings' wings had grown, so that the geese could start for the south. Nils was so happy that he laughed and sang as he rode on the gander's back. It was not only on account of the darkness and cold that he longed to get away from Lapland; there were other reasons too.

The first weeks of his sojourn there the boy had not been the least bit homesick. He thought he had never before seen such a glorious country. The only worry he had had was to keep the mosquitoes from eating him up.

Nils had seen very little of the gander, because the big white gander thought only of his Dunfin and was unwilling to leave her for a moment. On the other hand, Tummetott had stuck to Akka and Gorgo the eagle, and the three of them had passed many happy hours together.

The two birds had taken him with them on long trips. He had stood on snow-capped Mount Kebnekaise, had looked down at the glaciers, and visited many high cliffs seldom tramped by human feet. Akka had shown him deep-hidden mountain dales and had let him peep into caves where mother wolves brought up their young. He had also made the acquaintance of the tame reindeer that grazed in herds along the shores of the beautiful Torne Lake, and he had been down to the great falls and brought greetings to the bears that

lived thereabouts from their friends and relatives in Västmanland.

But ever since he had seen Osa, the goose girl, he longed for the day when he might go home with Morten Gander and be a normal human being once more. He wanted to be himself again, so that Osa would not be afraid to talk to him and would not shut the door in his face.

Yes, indeed he was glad that at last they were speeding southward. He waved his cap and cheered when he saw the first pine forest. In the same manner he greeted the first grey cottage, the first goat, the first cat, and the first chicken.

They were continually meeting birds of passage, flying now in greater flocks than in the spring.

‘Where are you bound for, wild geese?’ called the passing birds. ‘Where are you bound for?’

‘We, like yourselves, are going abroad,’ answered the geese.

‘Those goslings of yours aren’t ready to fly,’ screamed the others. ‘They’ll never cross the sea with those puny wings!’

Laplander and reindeer were also leaving the mountains. When the wild geese sighted the reindeer they circled down and called out:

‘Thanks for your company this summer!’

‘A pleasant journey to you and a welcome back!’ returned the reindeer.

But when the bears saw the wild geese, they pointed them out to the cubs and growled:

‘Just look at those geese; they are so afraid of a little cold they don’t dare to stay at home in winter.’

But the old geese were ready with a retort and cried to their goslings:

‘Look at those beasts that stay at home and sleep half the year rather than go to the trouble of travelling south!’

Down in the pine forest the young grouse sat huddled together and gazed longingly after the big bird flocks which, amid joy and merriment, proceeded southward.

‘When will our turn come?’ they asked the mother grouse.

‘You will have to stay at home with mamma and papa,’ she said.

PART SEVENTEEN

LEGENDS FROM HÄRJEDALEN

NILS HAD had three days' travel in the rain and mist and longed for some sheltered nook, where he might rest awhile.

At last the geese alighted to feed and ease their wings a bit. To his great relief the boy saw an observation tower on a hill close by, and dragged himself to it.

When he had climbed to the top of the tower he found a party of tourists there, so he quickly crawled into a dark corner and was soon sound asleep.

When Nils awoke he began to feel uneasy because the tourists lingered so long in the tower telling stories. He thought they would never go. Morten Gander could not come for him while they were there and he knew, of course, that the wild geese were in a hurry to continue the journey. In the middle of a story he thought he heard a honking and the beating of wings, as if the geese were flying away, but he did not dare to venture over to the balustrade to find out if it was so.

At last, when the tourists were gone and the boy could crawl from his hiding-place, he saw no wild geese, and no Morten Gander came to fetch him. He called: 'Here am I, where are you?' as loud as he could, but his travelling companions did not appear. Not for a second did he think they had deserted him; but he feared that they had met with some mishap and was wondering what he should do to find them, when Bataki, the raven, lit beside him.

Nils never dreamed that he should greet Bataki with such a glad welcome as he now gave him.

‘Dear Bataki,’ he burst forth. ‘How fortunate that you are here! Maybe you know what has become of Morten Gander and the wild geese?’

‘I’ve just come with a greeting from them,’ replied the raven. ‘Akka saw a hunter prowling about on the mountain and therefore dared not stay to wait for you, but has gone on ahead. Get up on my back and you shall soon be with your friends.’

The boy quickly seated himself on the raven’s back and Bataki would soon have caught up with the geese had he not been hindered by a fog. It was as if the morning sun had awakened it to life. Little light veils of mist rose suddenly from the lake, from fields, and from the forest. They thickened and spread with marvellous rapidity, and soon the entire ground was hidden from sight by white, rolling mists.

Bataki flew along above the fog in clear air and sparkling sunshine, but the wild geese must have circled down among the damp clouds, for it was impossible to sight them. The boy and the raven called and shrieked but got no response.

‘Well, this is a stroke of ill luck!’ said Bataki finally. ‘But we know that they are travelling toward the south, and of course I’ll find them as soon as the mist clears.’

Nils was distressed at the thought of being parted from Morten Gander just now, when the geese were on the wing, and the big white one might meet with all sorts of mishaps. After he had been sitting worrying for two hours or more, he remarked to himself that, thus far, there had been no mishap, and it was not worth while to lose heart.

Just then he heard a cock crowing down on the ground,

and instantly he bent forward on the raven's back and called out:

'What's the name of the country I'm travelling over?'

'It's called Härjedalen, Härjedalen, Härjedalen,' crowed the cock.

'How does it look down there where you are?' Nils asked.

'Cliffs in the west, woods in the east, broad valleys across the whole country,' replied the cock.

'Thank you,' cried the boy. 'You give a clear account of it.'

When they had travelled a little farther he heard a crow cawing down in the mist.

'What kind of people live in this country?' shouted Nils.

'Good, thrifty peasants,' answered the crow. 'Good, thrifty peasants.'

'What do they do?' asked the boy. 'What do they do?'

'They raise cattle and fell forests,' cawed the crow.

'Thanks,' replied the boy. 'You answer well.'

A bit farther on he heard a human voice yodelling and singing down in the mist.

'Is there any large city in this part of the country?' the boy asked.

'What—what—who is it that calls?' cried the human voice.

'Is there any large city in this region?' the boy repeated.

'I want to know who it is that calls,' shouted the human voice.

'I might have known that I could get no information when I asked a human being a question,' the boy retorted.

It was not long before the mist went away as suddenly as it had come. Then the boy saw a beautiful landscape, with high cliffs as in Jämtland, but there were no large, flourishing settlements on the mountain slopes. The villages lay far apart, and the farms were small. Bataki followed a wide river valley southward till they came within sight of a village. There he alighted in a stubble field and let the boy dismount.

‘In the summer grain grew on this ground,’ said Bataki. ‘Look around and see if you can’t find something eatable.’

Nils acted upon the suggestion and before long he found an ear of barley. As he picked out the grains and ate them Bataki talked to him.

‘Do you see that mountain towering directly south of us?’ he asked.

‘Yes, of course, I see it,’ said the boy.

‘It is called Sonfjället,’ continued the raven; ‘you can imagine that wolves were plentiful there once upon a time.’

‘It must have been an ideal place for wolves,’ said Nils.

‘The people who lived here in the valley were frequently attacked by them,’ remarked the raven.

‘Perhaps you remember a good wolf story you could tell me?’ said the boy.

‘I’ve been told that a long, long time ago the wolves from Sonfjället are supposed to have waylaid a man who had gone out to peddle his wares,’ began Bataki. ‘He was from Hede, a village a few miles down the valley. It was winter time and the wolves made for him as he was driving over the ice on the River Ljusnan. There were about nine or ten, and the man from Hede had a poor old horse, so there was very little hope of his escaping.

‘When the man heard the wolves howl and saw how many there were after him, he lost his head, and it did not occur to him that he ought to dump his casks and jugs out of the sledge, to lighten the load. He only whipped up the horse and made the best speed he could, but he soon saw that the wolves were gaining on him. The shores were desolate and he was fourteen miles from the nearest farm. He thought that his final hour had come and was paralysed with fear.

‘While he sat there terrified, he saw something move in the brush, which had been set in the ice to mark out the road; and when he discovered who it was that walked there his fear grew more and more intense.

‘Wild beasts were not coming toward him, but a poor old woman, named Finn-Malin, who was in the habit of roaming about on highways and byways. She was a hunchback and slightly lame, so he recognized her at a distance.

‘The old woman was walking straight toward the wolves. The sledge had hidden them from her view, and the man understood at once that, if he were to drive on without warning her, she would walk right into the jaws of the wild beasts, and while they were rending her he would have time enough to get away.

‘The old woman walked slowly, bent over a stick. It was plain that she was doomed if he did not help her, but even if he were to stop and take her into the sledge, it was by no means certain that she would be safe. More than likely the wolves would catch up with them, and he and she and the horse would all be killed. He wondered if it were not better to sacrifice one life in order that two might be spared—this flashed upon him the minute he saw the old woman. He had also time

to think how it would be with him afterward—if perchance he might regret that he had not saved her; or if people should some day learn of the meeting and that he had not tried to help her. It was a terrible temptation.

“‘I would rather not have seen her,’” he said to himself.

‘Just then the wolves howled savagely. The horse reared, plunged forward, and dashed past the old beggar woman. She too had heard the howling of the wolves and, as the man from Hede drove by, he saw that the old woman knew what awaited her. She stood motionless, her mouth open for a cry, her arms stretched out for help. But she neither cried nor tried to throw herself into the sledge. Something seemed to have turned her to stone. “‘It was I,’” thought the man. “‘I must have looked like a demon as I passed.’”

‘He tried to feel satisfied now that he was certain of escape, but at that very moment his heart reproached him. Never before had he done a dastardly thing, and he felt now that his whole life was blasted.

“‘Let come what may,’” he said, and reined in the horse, “‘I cannot leave her alone with the wolves!’”

‘It was with great difficulty that he got the horse to turn, but in the end he managed it and promptly drove back to her.

“‘Be quick and get into the sledge,’” he said gruffly; for he was angry with himself for not leaving the old woman to her fate.

“‘You might stay at home once in a while, you old hag!’” he growled. “‘Now both my horse and I will come to grief on your account.’”

‘The old woman did not say a word, but the man from Hede was in no mood to spare her.

““The horse has already gone thirty-five miles to-day, and the load hasn’t lightened since you got up on it!” he grumbled, “so that you must understand he’ll soon be exhausted.”

“The sledge runners crunched on the ice, but for all that he heard how the wolves panted, and knew that the beasts were almost upon him.

““It’s all up with us!” he said. “Much good it was, either to you or to me, this attempt to save you, Finn-Malin!”

‘Up to this point the old woman had been silent—like one who is accustomed to take abuse—but now she said a few words.

““I can’t understand why you don’t throw out your wares and lighten the load. You can come back again to-morrow and gather them up.”

‘The man realized that this was sound advice and was surprised that he had not thought of it before. He tossed the reins to the old woman, loosed the ropes that bound the casks, and pitched them out. The wolves were right upon them, but now they stopped to examine that which was thrown on the ice, and the travellers again had the start of them.

““If this does not help you,” said the old woman, “you understand, of course, that I will give myself up to the wolves voluntarily that you may escape.”

‘While she was speaking the man was trying to push a heavy brewer’s vat from the long sledge. As he tugged at this he paused, as if he could not quite make up his mind to throw it out; but in reality his mind was taken up with something altogether different.

““Surely a man and a horse who have no infirmities need not let a feeble old woman be devoured by wolves for their sakes!” he thought. “There must be some

other way of salvation. Why, of course, there is! It's only stupidity that hinders me from finding the way."

'Again he started to push the vat, then paused once more and burst out laughing.

'The old woman was alarmed and wondered if he had gone mad, but the man from Hede was laughing at himself because he had been so stupid all the while. It was the simplest thing in the world to save all three of them. He could not imagine why he had not thought of it before.

"Listen to what I say to you, Malin!" he said. "It was splendid of you to be willing to throw yourself to the wolves. But you won't have to do that because I know how we can all three be helped without endangering the life of any. Remember, whatever I may do, you are to sit still and drive down to Linsäll. There you must waken the people and tell them that I'm alone out here on the ice surrounded by wolves, and ask them to come and help me."

'The man waited until the wolves were almost upon the sledge. Then he rolled out the big brewer's vat, jumped down, and crawled in under it.

'It was a huge vat, large enough to hold a whole Christmas brew. The wolves pounced upon it and bit at the hoops, but the vat was too heavy for them to move. They could not get at the man inside.

'He knew that he was safe and laughed at the wolves. After a bit he was serious again.

"For the future, when I get into a tight place, I shall remember this vat, and I shall bear in mind that I need never wrong either myself or others, for there is always a third way out of a difficulty if only one can hit upon it."

With this Bataki closed his narrative.



He rolled out the big brewer's vat

The boy noticed that the raven never spoke unless there was some special meaning behind his words, and the longer he listened to him the more thoughtful he became.

‘I wonder why you told me that story?’ remarked the boy.

‘I just happened to think of it as I stood here gazing up at Sonfjället,’ replied the raven.

Now they travelled farther down the River Ljusnan and in an hour or so they came to Kolsätt, a village close to the border of Hälsingland. Here the raven alighted near a little hut that had no windows—only a shutter. From the chimney rose sparks and smoke, and from within the sound of heavy hammering was heard.

‘Whenever I see this smithy,’ observed the raven, ‘I’m reminded that, in former times, there were such skilled blacksmiths here in Härjedalen—more especially in this village—that they couldn’t be matched in the whole country.’

‘Perhaps you also remember a story about them?’ said the boy.

‘Yes,’ returned Bataki, ‘I remember one about a smith from Härjedalen who once invited two other master blacksmiths—one from Dalecarlia and one from Värmland—to compete with him at nail-making. The challenge was accepted and the three blacksmiths met here at Kolsätt. The Dalecarlian began. He forged a dozen nails, so even and smooth and sharp that they couldn’t be improved upon. After him came the Värmlander. He too forged a dozen nails, which were quite perfect and, moreover, he finished them in half the time that it took the Dalecarlian. When the judges saw this they said to the Härjedal smith that it wouldn’t be worth

while for him to try, since he could not forge better than the Dalecarlian or faster than the Värmlander.

“I shan’t give up. There must be still another way of doing a good job,” said the Härjedal smith.

‘He placed the iron on the anvil without heating it at the forge; he simply hammered it hot and forged nail after nail, without the use of either anvil or bellows. None of the judges had ever seen a blacksmith wield a hammer more masterfully, and the Härjedal smith was proclaimed the best in the land.’

With these remarks Bataki subsided, and the boy grew even more thoughtful.

‘I wonder what your purpose was in telling me that?’ he queried.

‘The story dropped into my mind when I saw the old smithy again,’ said Bataki in an offhand manner.

The two travellers rose again into the air and the raven carried the boy southward till they came to Lillhärdal parish, where he alighted on a leafy mound at the top of a ridge.

‘I wonder if you know upon what mound you are standing?’ said Bataki.

The boy had to confess that he did not know.

‘This is a grave,’ said Bataki. ‘Beneath this mound lies the first settler in Härjedalen.’

‘Perhaps you have a story to tell of him too?’ said the boy.

‘I haven’t heard much about him, but I think he was a Norwegian. He had served with a Norwegian king, got into his bad graces, and had to flee the country.

‘Later he went over to the Swedish king who lived at Upsala, and took service with him. But after a time he asked for the hand of the king’s sister in marriage, and

when the king wouldn't give him such a high-born bride, he eloped with her. By that time he had managed to get himself into such disfavour that it wasn't safe for him to live either in Norway or Sweden, and he did not wish to move to a foreign country. "But there must still be a course open to me," he thought. With his servants and treasures, he journeyed through Dalecarlia until he arrived in the desolate forests beyond the outskirts of the province. There he settled, built houses, and broke up land. Thus, you see, he was the first man to settle in this part of the country.'

As the boy listened to the last story he looked very serious.

'I wonder what your object is in telling me all this?' he repeated.

Bataki twisted and turned and screwed up his eyes, and it was some time before he answered the boy.

'Since we are here alone,' he said finally, 'I shall take this opportunity to question you regarding a certain matter.

'Have you ever tried to ascertain upon what terms the elf who transformed you was to restore you to a normal human being?'

'The only stipulation I've heard anything about was that I should take the white gander up to Lapland and bring him back to Skåne, safe and sound.'

'I thought as much,' said Bataki; 'for when last we met you talked confidently of there being nothing more contemptible than deceiving a friend who trusts one. You'd better ask Akka about the terms. You know, I dare say, that she was at your home and talked with the elf.'

'Akka hasn't told me of this,' said Nils wonderingly. 'She must have thought that it was best for you not

to know just what the elf *did* say. Naturally she would rather help you than Morten Gander.'

'It is strange, Bataki, that you always have a way of making me feel unhappy and anxious,' said the boy.

'I dare say it might seem so,' continued the raven, 'but this time I believe that you will be grateful to me for telling you that the elf's words were to this effect: You were to become a normal human being again if you would bring back Morten Gander that your mother might lay him on the block and chop his head off.'

The boy leaped up.

'That's only one of your mean lies,' he cried indignantly.

'You can ask Akka yourself,' said Bataki. 'I see her coming up there with her whole flock. And don't forget what I have told you to-day. There is usually a way out of all difficulties, if only one can find it. I shall be interested to see what success you have.'

PART EIGHTEEN

VARMLAND AND DALSLAND

THE NEXT day Nils took advantage of the rest hour, when Akka was feeding apart from the other wild geese, to ask her if that which Bataki had related was true, and Akka could not deny it. The boy made the leader-goose promise that she would not divulge the secret to Morten Gander. The big white gander was so brave and generous that he might do something rash were he to learn of the elf's stipulations.

Later Nils sat on goose-back, glum and silent, and hung his head. He heard the wild geese call out to the goslings that now they were in Dalecarlia, they could see Mount Städjan in the north, and that now they were flying over the east branch of the River Dalälveu to Horrmund Lake and were coming to the west branch. But the boy did not care even to glance at all this.

'I shall probably travel around with wild geese the rest of my life,' he thought, 'and I am likely to see more of this land than I wish.'

He was quite as indifferent when the wild geese called out to him that now they had arrived in Värmland and that the stream they were following southward was Klarälven.

'I've seen so many rivers already,' thought Nils, 'why bother to look at one more?'

Even had he been more eager for sightseeing there was not very much to be seen, for northern Värmland is nothing but vast, monotonous forest tracts, through which Klarälven winds—narrow and rich in rapids.

Here and there one can see a charcoal kiln, a forest clearing, or a few low, chimneyless huts, occupied by Finns. But the forest as a whole is so huge one might fancy it was far up in Lapland.

A LITTLE MANOR

The wild geese followed Klarälven as far as the big iron foundries at Munkfors. Then they proceeded westward to the valley Fryksdalen. Before they got to Lake Fryken it began to grow dusk, and they alighted in a little wet morass on a wooded hill. The morass was certainly a good night quarter for the wild geese, but Nils thought it dismal and rough, and wished for a better sleeping place. While he was still high in the air he had noticed that below the ridge lay a number of farms, and with great haste he proceeded to seek them out.

They were farther away than he had thought and several times he was tempted to turn back. Presently the woods became less dense, and he came to a road skirting the edge of the forest. From it branched a pretty birch-bordered lane, which led down to a farm, and immediately he hastened toward it.

First Nils entered a backyard as large as a city market-place and enclosed by a long row of red houses. As he crossed it he saw another yard where the dwelling-house faced a gravel path and a wide lawn. Behind the house there was a garden thick with foliage. The dwelling itself was small and jumbled, but the courtyard was edged by a row of exceedingly tall mountain ash trees, so close together that they formed a real wall around it. It appeared to the boy that he were coming into a great, high-vaulted chamber, with the lovely pale

blue sky for a ceiling. The mountain ash were thick with clusters of red berries, the grass plots were still green, of course, but that night there was a full moon, and as the bright moonlight fell upon the grass it looked as white as silver.

No human being was in sight and Nils could wander freely wherever he wished. When he was in the garden he saw something which almost put him in good humour. He had climbed a mountain ash to eat berries, but before he could reach a cluster he caught sight of a bird-cherry tree, which was also full of berries. He slid along the ash branch and clambered up into the bird-cherry tree, but he was no sooner there than he discovered a currant bush, on which still hung long red clusters. Next he saw that the garden was full of gooseberries and raspberries and dog-rose bushes; that there were cabbages and turnips in the vegetable beds and berries on every bush, seeds on the herbs, and grain-filled ears on every blade. And there on the path—no, of course he could not mistake it—was a big red apple which shone in the moonlight.

Nils sat down at the side of the path, with the big red apple in front of him, and began cutting little pieces from it with his sheath knife.

‘It wouldn’t be so hard to be an elf all one’s life if it were always as easy to get good food as it is here,’ he thought.

He sat and mused as he ate, wondering finally if it would not be as well for him to remain here and let the wild geese travel without him.

‘I don’t know for the life of me how I can ever explain to Morten Gander that I cannot go home,’ thought he. ‘It would be better were I to leave him altogether. I could gather provisions enough for the winter, as well

as the squirrels do, and if I were to live in a dark corner of the stable or the cowshed I shouldn't freeze to death.'

Just as he was thinking this, he heard a light rustle over his head, and a second later something which resembled a birch stump stood on the ground beside him.

The stump twisted and turned, and two bright dots on top of it glowed like coals of fire. It looked like some enchantment. However, Nils soon noticed that the stump had a hooked beak and big feather wreaths around its glowing eyes. Then he knew that this was no enchantment.

'It is a real pleasure to meet a living creature,' he said. 'Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me the name of this place, Mrs. Brown Owl, and what sort of people live here.'

That evening, as on all other evenings, the owl had perched on a rung of the big ladder propped against the roof, from which she had looked down toward the gravel walks and grass plots, watching for rats. Very much to her surprise not a single grey skin had appeared. She saw instead something that looked like a human being, but much, much smaller, moving about in the garden.

'That's the one who is scaring away the rats!' thought the owl. 'What in the world can it be? It's not a squirrel nor a kitten nor a weasel,' she observed. 'I suppose that a bird who has lived on an old place like this as long as I have ought to know about everything in the world; but this is beyond my comprehension,' she concluded.

She had been staring at the object that moved on the gravel path until her eyes burned. Finally curiosity got

the better of her and she flew down to the ground to have a closer view of the stranger.

When the boy began to speak the owl bent forward and looked him up and down.

'He has neither claws nor horns,' she thought, 'yet who knows but he may have a poisonous fang or some even more dangerous weapon. I must try to find out what he passes for before I venture to touch him.'

'The place is called Mårbacka,' said the owl, 'and gentlefolk lived here once upon a time. But you, yourself, who are you?'

'I think of moving in here,' said Nils without answering the owl's question. 'Would it be possible, do you think?'

'Oh, yes—but it's not much of a place now compared to what it was once,' said the owl. 'But one can survive. It all depends upon what you expect to live on. Do you intend to take up the rat chase?'

'Oh, by no means!' declared the boy. 'There is more fear of the rats eating me than that I shall do them any harm.'

'It can't be that he is as harmless as he says,' thought the brown owl. 'All the same I believe I'll make an attempt. . . .' She rose into the air, and in a second her claws were fastened in Nils Holgersson's shoulder and she was trying to hack at his eyes.

The boy shielded both eyes with one hand and tried to free himself with the other, at the same time calling with all his might for help. He realized that he was in deadly peril and thought that this time, surely, it was all over with him!

Now I must tell you of a strange coincidence: The very year that Nils travelled with the wild geese there

was a woman who thought of writing a book about Sweden which would be suitable for children to read in the schools. She had thought of this from Christmas time until the following autumn: but not a line of the book had she written. At last she became so tired of the whole thing that she said to herself: 'You are not fitted for such work. Sit down and compose stories and legends, as usual, and let another write this book, which has got to be serious and instructive, and in which there must not be one untruthful word.'

It was as good as settled that she would abandon the idea. But she thought, very naturally, it would have been pleasant to write something beautiful about Sweden, and it was hard for her to relinquish her work. Finally it occurred to her that maybe it was because she lived in a city, with only grey streets and house walls around her, that she could make no headway with the writing. Perhaps if she were to go into the country, where she could see woods and fields, it might go better.

She was from Värmland, and it was perfectly clear to her that she wished to begin the book with that province. First of all she would write about the place where she had grown up. It was a little manor, far removed from the great world, where many old-time habits and customs were retained. She thought that it would be entertaining for children to hear of the many duties which had succeeded one another round the year. She wanted to tell them how they celebrated Christmas and New Year and Easter and Midsummer Day in her home; what kind of house furnishings they had; what the kitchen and larder were like, and how the cowshed, stable, barn, and bath-house had looked. But when she was to write about it the pen would not move.

Why this was she could not in the least understand; nevertheless it was so.

True, she remembered it all just as distinctly as if she were still living in the midst of it. She argued with herself that since she was going into the country anyway, perhaps she ought to make a little trip to the old homestead that she might see it again before writing about it. She had not been there for many years and did not think it a bad idea to have a reason for the journey. In fact she had always longed to be there, no matter in what part of the world she happened to be. She had seen many places that were more pretentious and prettier. But nowhere could she find such comfort and protection as in the home of her childhood.

It was not such an easy matter for her to go home as one might think, for the estate had been sold to people she did not know. She felt, to be sure, that they would receive her well, but she did not wish to go to the old place to sit and talk with strangers, for she wanted to remember how it had been in times gone by. That was why she planned it so as to arrive there late in the evening, when the day's work was done and the people were indoors.

She had never imagined that it would be so strange to come home. As she sat in the cart and drove toward the old manor she fancied that she was growing younger and younger every minute, and that soon she was no longer an oldish person with hair that was turning grey, but a little girl in short skirts with a long flaxen plait. As she recognized each farm along the road, she could not only picture that everything at home would be as in bygone days. Her father and mother and brothers and sisters would be standing on the porch to welcome her; the old housekeeper would run to the kitchen

window to see who was coming, and Nero and Freja and another dog or two would come bounding and jumping up on her.

The nearer she approached the place the happier she felt. It was autumn, which meant a busy time with a round of duties. It must have been all these varying duties which prevented home from ever being monotonous. All along the way the farmers were digging potatoes, and probably they would be doing likewise at her home. That meant that they must begin immediately to grate potatoes and make potato flour. The autumn had been a mild one; she wondered if everything in the garden had already been stored. The cabbages were still out, but perhaps the hops had been picked, and all the apples.

It would be well if they were not having house cleaning at home. Autumn fair time was drawing near, everywhere the cleaning and scouring had to be done before the fair opened. That was regarded as a great event—more especially by the servants. It was a pleasure to go into the kitchen on Market Eve and see the newly scoured floor strewn with juniper twigs, the whitewashed walls, and the shining copper utensils which were suspended from the ceiling.

Even after the fair festivities were over there would not be much of a breathing spell, for then came the work on the flax. During dog days the flax had been spread out on a meadow to mould. Now it was laid in the old bath-house, where the stove was lighted to dry it out. When it was dry enough to handle all the women in the neighbourhood were called together. They sat outside the bath-house and picked the flax to pieces. Then they beat it with swings to separate the fine white fibres from the dry stems. As they worked the

women grew grey with dust; their hair and clothing were covered with flax fibres, but they did not seem to mind it. All day the swings pounded and the chatter went on, so that when one went near the old bath-house it sounded as if a blustering storm had broken loose there.

After the work with the flax came the big hard-tack baking, the sheep shearing, and the servants' moving time. In November there were busy slaughter days, with salting of meats, sausage making, baking of blood pudding, and candle steeping. The seamstress who used to make up their homespun dresses would also come at this time, and those were always two pleasant weeks—when the women sat together and busied themselves with sewing. The cobbler, who made shoes for the entire household, sat working at the same time in the menservants' quarters, and one never tired of watching him as he cut the leather and soled and heeled the shoes and put eyelets in the shoe-string holes.

But the greatest rush came around Christmas time. Lucia Day—when the housemaid went about dressed in white, with candles in her hair, and served coffee to everybody at five in the morning—came as a sort of reminder that for the next two weeks they could not count on much sleep. For now they must brew the Christmas ale, steep the Christmas fish in lye, and do their Christmas baking and Christmas scouring.

She was in the middle of the baking, with pans of Christmas buns and home-made pastry all around her, when the driver drew in the reins at the entry to the lane as she had requested. She started like one suddenly awakened from a sound sleep. It was dismal for her who had just dreamed herself surrounded by all her people to be sitting alone in the late evening. As she

stepped from the cart and started to walk up the long lane that she might come unobserved to her old home, she felt so keenly the contrast between then and now that she would have preferred to turn back.

‘Of what use is it to come here?’ she sighed. ‘It can’t be the same as in the old days!’

On the other hand she felt that since she had travelled such a long distance she would see the place at all events, so she continued to walk on, although she was more depressed with every step that she took.

She had heard that it was very much changed; and it certainly was! But she did not notice this now in the evening. She thought, rather, that everything was quite the same. There was the pond, which in her youth had been full of carp and where no one dared fish, because it was father’s wish that the carp should be left in peace. Over there were the menservants’ quarters, the larder and barn, with the farmyard bell over one gable and the weather-vane over the other. The house yard was like a fenced-in room, with no outlook in any direction, as it had been in her father’s time—for he had not the heart to cut down as much as a bush.

She lingered in the shadow under the big mountain ash at the entrance to the farm and stood looking about her. As she stood there a strange thing happened; a flock of doves came and alighted beside her.

She could hardly believe that they were real birds, for doves are not in the habit of moving about after sundown. It must have been the beautiful moonlight that had awakened these. They must have thought it was dawn and flown from their dovecotes, only to become confused, hardly knowing where they were. When they saw a human being they flew over to her, as if she would set them right.

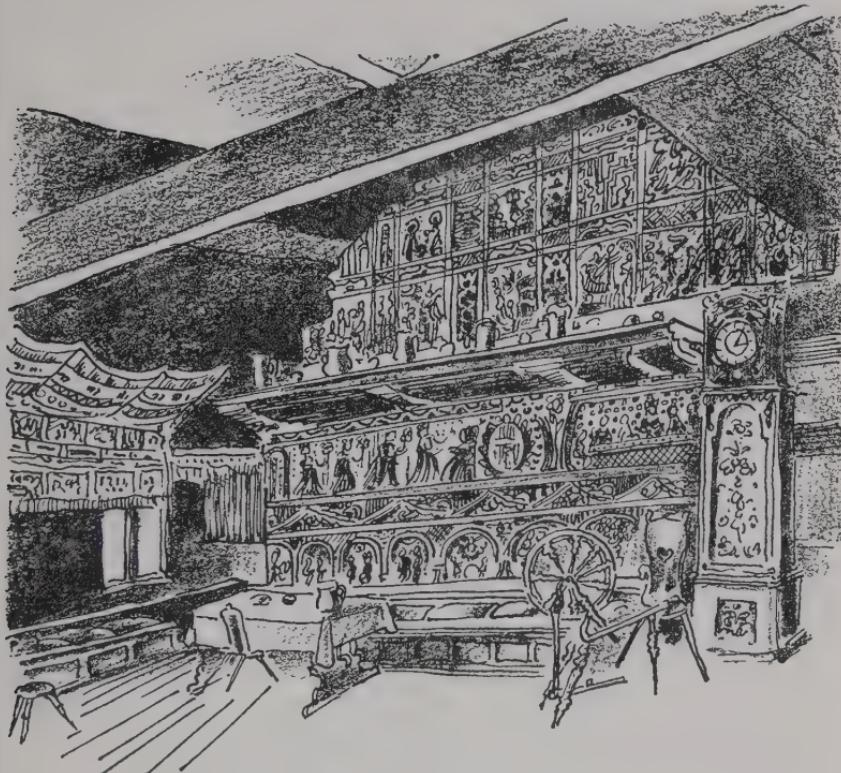
There had been many flocks of doves at the manor when her parents lived there, for the doves were among the creatures which her father had taken under his special care. If one ever mentioned the killing of a dove it put him in a bad humour. She was pleased that the pretty birds had come to meet her in the old home. Who could tell but the doves had flown out in the night to show her they had not forgotten that once upon a time they had a good home there.

Perhaps her father had sent his birds with a greeting to her, so that she would not feel so sad and lonely when she came to her former home.

As she thought of this there welled up within her such an intense longing for the old times that her eyes filled with tears. Life had been beautiful in this place. They had had weeks of work broken by many holiday festivities. They had toiled hard all day, but at evening they had gathered around the lamp and read Tegnér and Runeberg, 'Fru' Lenngren and 'Mamsell' Bremer. They had cultivated grain, but also roses and jasmine. They had spun flax, but had sung folk-songs as they spun. They had worked hard at their history and grammar, but they had also played theatre and written verses. They had stood at the kitchen stove and prepared food, but had learned also to play the flute and guitar, the violin and piano. They had planted cabbages and turnips, peas and beans in one garden, but they had another full of apples and pears and all kinds of berries. They had lived by themselves, and this was why so many stories and legends were stowed away in their memories. They had worn homespun clothes, but they had also been able to lead care-free and independent lives.

'Nowhere else in the world do they know how to get

so much out of life as they did at one of these little homesteads in my childhood,' she thought. 'There was just enough work and just enough play, and every day there was a joy. How I should love to come back



here again! Now that I have seen the place it is hard to leave it.'

Then she turned to the flock of doves and said to them—laughing at herself all the while:

'Won't you fly to father and tell him that I long to come home? I have wandered long enough in strange places. Ask him if he can't arrange it so that I may soon turn back to my childhood's home.'

The moment she had said this the flock of doves rose and flew away. She tried to follow them with her eyes, but they vanished instantly. It was as if the whole white company had dissolved in the shimmering air.

The doves had only just gone when she heard a couple of piercing cries from the garden, and as she hastened there she saw a singular sight. There stood a tiny midget, no taller than a hand's breadth, struggling with a brown owl. At first she was so astonished that she could not move. But when the midget cried more and more pitifully, she stepped up quickly and parted the fighters. The owl swung herself into a tree, but the midget stood on the gravel path, without attempting either to hide or to run away.

'Thanks for your help,' he said. 'But it was very stupid of you to let the owl escape. I can't get away from here, because she is sitting up in the tree watching me.'

'It was thoughtless of me to let her go. But to make amends can't I accompany you to your home?' asked she who wrote stories, somewhat surprised to think that in this unexpected fashion she had got into conversation with one of the tiny folk. Still she was not so much surprised after all. It was as if all the while she had been awaiting some extraordinary experience, while she walked in the moonlight outside her old home.

'The fact is, I had thought of stopping here overnight,' said the midget. 'If you will only show me a safe sleeping place I shall not be obliged to return to the forest before daybreak.'

'Must I show you a place to sleep? Are you not at home here?'

'I understand that you take me for one of the tiny folk,' said the midget, 'but I'm a human being, like yourself, although I have been transformed by an elf.'

‘That is the most remarkable thing I have ever heard! Wouldn’t you like to tell me how you happened to get into such a plight?’

The boy did not mind telling her of his adventures, and, as the narrative proceeded, she who listened to him grew more and more astonished and happy.

‘What luck to run across one who has travelled all over Sweden on the back of a goose!’ thought she. ‘Just this which he is relating I shall write down in my book. Now I need worry no more over that matter. It was well that I came home. To think that I should find such help as soon as I came to the old place!’

Instantly another thought flashed into her mind. She had sent word to her father by the doves that she longed for home, and almost immediately she had received help in the matter she had pondered so long. Might not this be the father’s answer to her prayer?

PART NINETEEN

THE TREASURE ON THE ISLAND

ON THEIR WAY TO THE SEA

FROM the very start of the autumn trip the wild geese had flown straight south ; but when they left Fryksdalén they veered in another direction, travelling over western Värmland and Dalsland, towards Bohuslän.

That was a jolly trip ! The goslings were now so used to flying that they complained no more of fatigue, and Nils was fast recovering his good humour. He was glad that he had talked with a human being. He felt encouraged when she said to him that if he were to continue doing good to all whom he met, as heretofore, it could not end badly for him. She was not able to tell him how to get back his natural form, but she had given him a little hope and assurance, which inspired the boy to think out a way to prevent the big white gander from going home.

‘Do you know, Morten Gander, that it will be rather monotonous for us to stay at home all the winter after having been on a trip like this,’ he said, as they were flying far up in the air. ‘I’m sitting here thinking that we ought to go abroad with the geese.’

‘Surely you are not in earnest !’ said the gander. Since he had proved to the wild geese his ability to travel with them all the way to Lapland, he was perfectly satisfied to get back to the goose-pen in Holger Nilsson’s cowshed.

The boy sat silently a while and gazed down on

Värmland, where the birch woods, leafy groves, and gardens were clad in red and yellow autumn colours.

‘I don’t think I’ve ever seen the earth beneath us as lovely as it is to-day!’ he finally remarked. ‘The lakes are like blue satin bands. Don’t you think it would be a pity to settle down in West Vemmenhög and never see any more of the world?’

‘I thought you wanted to go home to your mother and father and show them what a splendid boy you had become?’ said the gander.

All the summer he had been dreaming of what a proud moment it would be for him when he should alight in the house yard before Holger Nilsson’s cabin and show Dunfin and the six goslings to the geese and chickens, the cows and the cat, and to Mother Holger Nilsson herself, so that he was not very happy over the boy’s proposal.

‘Now, Morten Gander, don’t you think yourself that it would be hard never to see anything as beautiful as this,’ said the boy, gazing down at the autumn landscape.

‘I would rather see the fat grain fields of Söderslätt than these lean hills,’ answered the gander. ‘But you must know very well that if you really wish to continue the trip I can’t be parted from you.’

‘That is just the answer I had expected from you,’ said the boy, and his voice betrayed that he was relieved of a great anxiety.

Later, when they travelled over Bohuslän, Nils noticed that the mountain stretches were more continuous, the valleys were more like little ravines blasted in the rock foundation, while the long lakes at their base were as black as if they had come from the underworld. This too was a glorious country, and as the boy saw it, with now a strip of sun, now a shadow, he thought that there

was something strange and wild about it. He knew not why, but the idea came to him that once upon a time there must have been many strong and brave heroes in these mystical regions who had passed through many dangerous and daring adventures. The old passion of wanting to share in all sorts of wonderful adventures awoke in him.

‘I might possibly miss not being in danger of my life at least once every day or two,’ he thought. ‘Anyhow it’s best to be content with things as they are.’

He did not speak of this idea to the big white gander, because the geese were now flying over Bohuslän with all the speed they could muster, and the gander was puffing so hard that he would not have had the strength to reply.

The sun was far down on the horizon, and disappeared every now and then behind a hill; still the geese kept forging ahead.

Finally, in the west, they saw a shining strip of light, which grew broader and broader with every wing stroke. Soon the sea spread before them, milk white with a shimmer of rose red and sky blue, and when they had circled past the coast cliffs they saw the sun again, as it hung over the sea, big and red and ready to plunge into the waves.

As the boy gazed at the broad, endless sea and the red evening sun, which had such a kindly glow that he dared to look straight at it, he felt a sense of peace and calm penetrate his soul.

‘It’s not worth while to be sad, Nils Holgersson,’ said the sun. ‘This is a beautiful world to live in both for big and little. It is also good to be free and happy, and to have a great dome of open sky above you.’

THE GIFT OF THE WILD GEESE

The geese stood sleeping on a little rock islet just beyond Fjällbacka. When it drew on toward midnight, and the moon hung high in the heavens, old Akka shook the sleepiness out of her eyes. After that she walked around and awakened Yksi and Kaksi, Holme and Nelkä, Viisi and Kuusi, and last of all she gave Tummetott a nudge with her bill that startled him.

‘What is it, Mother Akka?’ he asked, springing up in alarm.

‘Nothing serious,’ assured the leader-goose. ‘It’s just this: we seven who have been long together want to fly a short distance out to sea to-night, and we wondered if you would care to come with us.’

The boy knew that Akka would not have proposed this move had there not been something important on foot, so he promptly seated himself on her back. The flight was due west. The wild geese first flew over a belt of large and small islands near the coast, then over a broad expanse of open sea, till they reached the large cluster known as the Väder Islands. All of them were low and rocky, and in the moonlight one could see that some of them were rather large.

Akka sought out one of the smallest islands and alighted there. It consisted of a round, grey stone hill, with a wide cleft across it, into which the sea had cast fine, white sea sand and a few shells.

As the boy slid from the goose’s back he noticed something quite close to him that looked like a jagged stone. But almost at once he saw that it was a big bird of prey which had chosen the rock island for a night harbour. Before the boy had time to wonder at the geese recklessly alighting so near a dangerous enemy,

the bird flew up to them and the boy recognized Gorgo the eagle.

Evidently Akka and Gorgo had arranged the meeting, for neither of them was taken by surprise.

'This was good of you, Gorgo,' said Akka. 'I didn't expect that you would be at the meeting place ahead of us. Have you been here long?'

'I came early in the evening,' replied Gorgo. 'But I fear that the only praise I deserve is for keeping my appointment with you. I've not been very successful in carrying out the orders you gave me.'

'I'm sure, Gorgo, that you have done more than you care to admit,' assured Akka. 'But before you relate your experiences on the trip, I shall ask Tummetott to help me find something which is supposed to be buried on this island.'

The boy stood gazing admiringly at two beautiful shells, but when Akka spoke his name he glanced up.

'You must have wondered, Tummetott, why we turned out of our course to fly here to the West Sea,' said Akka.

'To be frank, I did think it strange,' answered the boy. 'But I knew, of course, that you always have some good reason for whatever you do.'

'You have a good opinion of me,' returned Akka, 'but I almost fear you will lose it now, for it's very probable that we have made this journey in vain.'

'Many years ago it happened that two of the other old geese and myself encountered frightful storms during a spring flight and were wind-driven to this island. When we discovered that there was only open sea before us, we feared we should be swept so far out that we should never find our way back to land, so we lay down on the waves between these bare cliffs, where the storm compelled us to remain for several days.'



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HE DUG WITH HIS FINGERS AND FELT MANY COINS IN THE SAND

‘We suffered terribly from hunger; once we ventured up to the cleft on this island in search of food. We couldn’t find a green blade, but we saw a number of securely tied bags half buried in the sand. We hoped to find grain in the bags and pulled and tugged at them till we tore the cloth. However, no grain poured out, but shining gold pieces. For such things we wild geese had no use, so we left them where they were. We haven’t thought of the find in all these years; but this autumn something has come up to make us wish for gold.

‘We do not know that the treasure is still here, but we have travelled all this way to ask you to look into the matter.’

With a shell in either hand the boy jumped down into the cleft and began to scoop up the sand. He found no bags, but when he had made a deep hole he heard the clink of metal and saw that he had come upon a gold piece. Then he dug with his fingers and felt many coins in the sand. So he hurried back to Akka.

‘The bags have rotted and fallen apart,’ he exclaimed, ‘and the money lies scattered all through the sand.’

‘That’s well!’ said Akka. ‘Now fill in the hole and smooth it over so no one will notice the sand has been disturbed.’

The boy did as he was told, but when he came up from the cleft he was astonished to see that the wild geese were lined up, with Akka in the lead, and were marching toward him with great solemnity.

The geese paused in front of him, and all bowed their heads many times, looking so grave that he had to doff his cap and make an obeisance to them.

‘The fact is,’ said Akka, ‘we old geese have been thinking that if Tummetott had been in the service of

human beings and had done as much for them as he has for us they would not let him go without rewarding him well.'

'I haven't helped you; it is you who have taken good care of me,' returned the boy.

'We think also,' continued Akka, 'that when a human being has attended us on a whole journey he shouldn't be allowed to leave us as poor as when he came.'

'I know that what I have learned this year with you is worth more to me than gold or lands,' said the boy.

'Since these gold coins have been lying unclaimed in the cleft all these years, I think that you ought to have them,' declared the wild goose.

'I thought you said something about needing this money yourselves,' reminded the boy.

'We do need it so as to be able to give you such recompense as will make your mother and father think you have been working as a goose boy with worthy people.'

Nils turned half round and cast a glance toward the sea, then faced about and looked straight into Akka's bright eyes.

'I think it strange, Mother Akka, that you turn me away from your service like this and pay me off before I have given you notice,' he said.

'As long as we wild geese remain in Sweden I trust that you will stay with us,' said Akka. 'I only wanted to show you where the treasure was while we could get to it without going too far out of our course.'

'All the same it looks as if you wished to be rid of me before I want to go,' argued Tummetott. 'After all the good times we have had together I think you ought to let me go abroad with you.'

When the boy said this, Akka and the other wild

geese stretched their long necks straight up and stood a moment, with bills half open, drinking in air.

‘That is something I haven’t thought about,’ said Akka, when she recovered herself. ‘Before you decide to come with us we had better hear what Gorgo has to say. You may as well know that when we left Lapland the agreement between Gorgo and myself was that he should travel to your home down in Skåne to try to make better terms for you with the elf.’

‘That is true,’ affirmed Gorgo, ‘but as I have already told you, luck was against me. I soon hunted up Holger Nilsson’s croft and after circling up and down over the place a couple of hours, I caught sight of the elf, skulking along between the sheds.

‘Immediately I swooped down upon him and flew off with him to a meadow where we could talk together without interruption.

‘I told him that I had been sent by Akka from Keb-nekaise to ask if he couldn’t give Nils Holgersson easier terms.

“‘I only wish I could!’” he answered, “for I have heard that he has conducted himself well on the trip; but it is not in my power to do so.”

‘Then I got into a rage and said that I would bore out his eyes unless he gave in.

“‘You may do as you like,’ he retorted, “but as to Nils Holgersson, it will turn out exactly as I have said. You can tell him from me that he would do well to return soon with his goose, for matters on the farm are in a bad way. His father has had to forfeit a bond for his brother, whom he trusted. He had bought a horse with borrowed money, and the beast went lame the first time he drove it. Since then it has been of no earthly use to him. Tell Nils Holgersson that his

parents have had to sell two of the cows and that they must give up the croft unless they receive help from somewhere.'

When the boy heard this he frowned and clenched his fists so hard that the nails dug into his flesh.

'It is cruel of the elf to make the conditions so hard for me that I cannot go home and relieve my parents, but he shan't turn me into a traitor to a friend! My father and mother are honest people. I know they would rather forfeit my help than have me come back to them with a guilty conscience.'

PART TWENTY

THE JOURNEY TO VEMMENHÖG

ONE DAY in the beginning of November the wild geese flew over Halland Ridge and into Skåne. For several weeks they had been resting on the wide plains around Falköping. As many other wild goose flocks also stopped there, the older geese had had a pleasant time visiting with old friends, and there had been all kinds of games and races between the younger birds.

Nils Holgersson had not been happy over the delay in Västergötland. He had tried to keep a stout heart; but it was hard for him to reconcile himself to his fate.

‘If I were only well out of Skåne and in some foreign land,’ he had thought, ‘I should know for certain that I had nothing to hope for, and would feel easier in my mind.’

Finally one morning the geese started out and flew toward Halland.

In the beginning Nils took very little interest in that province. He thought there was nothing new to be seen there. But when the wild geese continued the journey farther south, along the narrow coast-lands, the boy leaned over the goose’s neck and did not take his glance from the ground.

He saw the hills gradually disappear and the plain spread under him. At the same time he noticed that the coast became less rugged, while the group of islands beyond thinned and finally vanished and the broad, open sea came clear up to firm land. Here there were no more forests: here the plain was supreme. It spread

all the way to the horizon. A land that lay so exposed, with field upon field, reminded the boy of Skåne. He felt both happy and sad as he looked at it.

‘I can’t be very far from home,’ he thought.

Many times during the trip the goslings had asked the old geese:

‘How does it look in foreign lands?’

‘Wait, wait! You shall soon see,’ the old geese had answered.

When the wild geese had passed Halland Ridge and gone a distance into Skåne, Akka called out:

‘Now look down! Look all around! It is like this in foreign lands.’

Just then they flew over Söder Ridge. The whole long range of hills was clad in beech woods, and beautiful, turreted castles peeped out here and there.

Among the trees grazed roebuck, and on the forest meadow romped the hares. Hunters’ horns sounded from the forests; the loud baying of dogs could be heard all the way up to the wild geese. Broad avenues wound through the trees and on these ladies and gentlemen were driving in polished carriages or riding fine horses. At the foot of the ridge lay Ringsjön Lake with the ancient manor Bosjökloster on a narrow peninsula.

‘Does it look like this in foreign lands?’ asked the goslings.

‘It looks exactly like this wherever there are forest-clad ridges,’ replied Akka, ‘only one doesn’t see many of them. Wait! You shall see how it looks in general.’

Akka led the geese farther south to the great Skåne plain. There it spread, with grain fields; with acres and acres of sugar-beets, where the beet-pickers were at work; with low whitewashed farm- and out-houses; with numberless little white churches; with ugly, grey sugar

refineries, and small villages near the railway stations. Little beech-encircled meadow lakes, each of them adorned by its own stately manor, shimmered here and there.

‘Now look down! Look carefully!’ called the leader-goose. ‘Thus it is in foreign lands, from the Baltic coast all the way down to the high Alps. Farther than that I have never travelled.’

When the goslings had seen the plain, the leader-goose flew down the Öresund coast. Swampy meadows sloped gradually toward the sea. In some places were high, steep banks, in others drift-sand fields, where the sand lay heaped in banks and hills. Fishing hamlets stood all along the coast, with long rows of low, uniform brick houses, with a lighthouse at the edge of the breakwater, and brown fishing nets hanging in the drying-yard.

‘Now look down! Look well! This is how it looks along the coasts in foreign lands.’

After Akka had been flying about in this manner a long time she alighted suddenly on a marsh in Vemmenhög township, and the boy could not help thinking that she had travelled over Skåne just to let him see that his was a country which could compare favourably with any in the world. This was unnecessary, for Nils was not thinking of whether the country was rich or poor.

From the moment that he had seen the first willow grove his heart ached with homesickness.

PART TWENTY-ONE

HOME AT LAST

THE atmosphere was dull and hazy. The wild geese had been feeding on the big meadow around Skurup church and were having their noonday rest when Akka came up to the boy.

'It looks as if we should have calm weather for a while,' she remarked, 'and I think we'll cross the Baltic to-morrow.'

'Indeed!' said the boy abruptly, for his throat contracted so that he could hardly speak. All along he had cherished the hope that he would be released from the enchantment while he was still in Skåne.

'We are quite near West Vemmenhög now,' said Akka, 'and I thought that perhaps you might like to go home for a while. It may be some time before you have another opportunity to see your people.'

'Perhaps I had better not,' said the boy hesitatingly, but something in his voice betrayed that he was glad of Akka's proposal.

'If the gander remains with us, no harm can come to him,' Akka assured him. 'I think you had better find out how your parents are getting along. You might be of some help to them, even if you won't become a human being.'

'You are right, Mother Akka. I should have thought of that long ago,' said the boy impulsively.

The next second he and the leader-goose were on their way to his home. It was not long before Akka alighted behind the stone wall encircling the little farm.

'Strange how everything looks just the same!' the boy remarked, quickly clambering to the top of the wall, so that he could look about.

'It seems to me only yesterday that I first saw you come flying through the air.'

'I wonder if your father has a gun,' said Akka suddenly.

'You may be sure he has,' returned the boy. 'It was the gun that kept me at home that Sunday morning when I should have been at church.'

'Then I don't dare to stand here and wait for you,' said Akka. 'You had better meet us at Smygehuk early to-morrow morning, so that you may stay at home overnight.'

'Oh, don't go yet, Mother Akka!' begged the boy, jumping from the wall.

He could not tell just why it was, but he felt as if something would happen, either to the wild goose or to himself, to prevent their future meeting.

'No doubt you see that I'm distressed because I cannot get back my right form; but I want to say to you that I don't regret having gone with you last spring,' he added. 'I would rather forfeit the chance of ever being human again than to have missed that trip.'

Akka breathed quickly before she answered.

'There's a little matter I should have mentioned to you before this, but since you are not going back to your home for good I thought there was no hurry about it. Still it may as well be said now.'

'You know very well that I am always glad to do your bidding,' said the boy.

'If you have learned anything at all from us, Tummetott, you no longer think that the humans should have the whole earth to themselves,' said the wild goose

solemnly. ‘Remember you have a large country and you can easily afford to leave a few bare rocks, a few shallow lakes and swamps, a few desolate cliffs and remote forests to us poor animals, where we can be allowed to live in peace. All my days I have been hounded and hunted. It would be a comfort to know that there is a refuge somewhere for one like me.’

‘Indeed I should be glad to help if I could,’ said the boy, ‘but it’s not likely that I shall ever again have any influence among human beings.’

‘Well, we’re standing here talking as if we were never to meet again,’ said Akka, ‘but we shall see each other to-morrow, of course. Now I’ll return to my flock.’

She spread her wings and started to fly, but came back and stroked Tummetott up and down with her bill before she flew away.

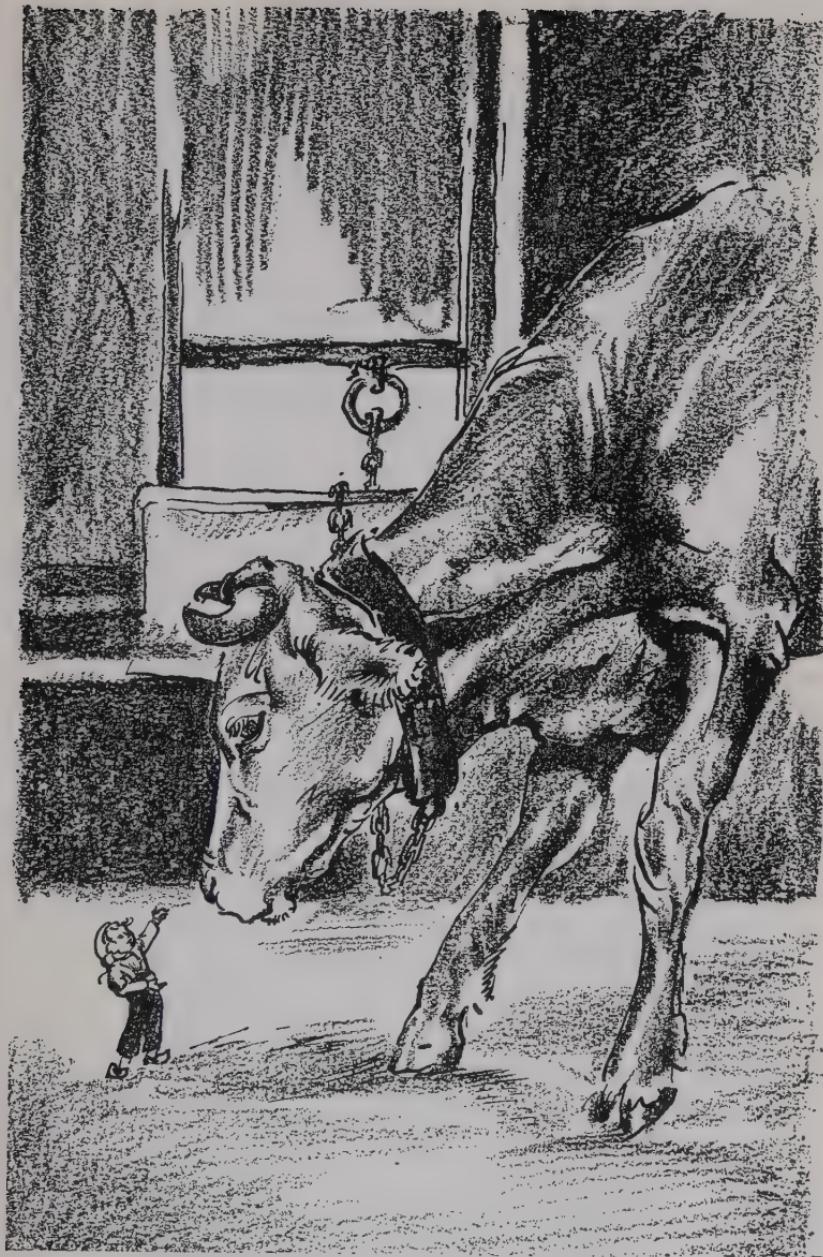
It was broad daylight, but no human being moved on the farm and the boy could go where he pleased. He hastened to the cowshed, because he knew that he could get the best information from the cows.

It looked rather barren in their shed. In the spring there had been three fine cows there, but now there was only one—Mayrose. It was quite apparent that she yearned for her comrades. Her head drooped sadly, and she had hardly touched the feed in her crib.

‘Good day, Mayrose!’ said the boy, running fearlessly into her stall.

‘How are mother and father? How are the cat and the chickens? What has become of Star and Gold-Lily?’

When Mayrose heard the boy’s voice she started, and appeared as if she were going to gore him. But she was not so quick-tempered now as formerly, and took time to look well at Nils Holgersson.



She . . . took time to look well at Nils Holgersson

He was just as little now as when he went away, and wore the same clothes; yet he was completely changed. The Nils Holgersson that went away in the spring had a heavy, slow gait, a drawling speech, and sleepy eyes. The one that had come back was lithe and alert, ready of speech, and had eyes that sparkled and danced. He had a confident bearing that commanded respect, little as he was. Although he himself did not look happy, he inspired happiness in others.

‘Moo!’ bellowed Mayrose. ‘They told me that you were changed, but I couldn’t believe it. Welcome home, Nils Holgersson! Welcome home! This is the first glad moment I have known for ever so long!’

‘Thank you, Mayrose!’ said the boy, who was very happy to be so well received.

‘Now tell me all about father and mother.’

‘They have had nothing but hardship ever since you went away,’ said Mayrose. ‘The horse has been a costly care all summer, for he has stood in the stable the whole time and not earned his feed. Your father is too soft-hearted to shoot him and he can’t sell him. It was on account of the horse that both Star and Gold-Lily had to be sold.’

There was something else the boy wanted badly to know, but he was diffident about asking the question point blank. Therefore he said:

‘Mother must have felt very sorry when she discovered that Morten Gander had flown?’

‘She wouldn’t have worried much about Morten Gander had she known the way he came to leave. She grieves most at the thought of her son having run away from home with a gander.’

‘Does she really think that I *stole* the gander?’ said the boy.

'What else could she think?'

'Father and mother must fancy that I've been roaming about the country, like a common tramp?'

'They think that you've gone to the dogs,' said Mayrose. 'They have mourned you as one mourns the loss of the dearest thing on earth.'

As soon as the boy heard this he rushed from the cowshed and down to the stable.

It was small, but clean and tidy. Everything showed that his father had tried to make the place comfortable for the new horse. In the stall stood a strong, fine animal that looked well fed and well cared for.

'Good day to you!' said the boy. 'I have heard that there's a sick horse in here. Surely it can't be you, who look so healthy and strong.'

The horse turned his head and stared fixedly at the boy.

'Are you the son?' he queried. 'I have heard many bad reports of him. But you have such a good face I couldn't believe that you were he, did I not know that he was transformed into an elf.'

'I know that I left a bad name behind me when I went away from the farm,' admitted Nils Holgersson. 'My own mother thinks I am a thief. But what does it matter—I shan't stay here long. Meanwhile I want to know what ails you.'

'Pity you're not going to stay,' said the horse, 'for I have the feeling that you and I might become good friends. I've got something in my foot—the point of a knife, or something sharp—that's all that ails me. It has gone so far in that the doctor can't find it, but it cuts so that I can't walk. If you would only tell your father what's wrong with me, I'm sure that he could help me. I should like to be of some use. I really feel ashamed to stand here and feed without doing any work.'

'It's well that you have no real illness,' remarked Nils Holgersson. 'I must attend to this at once, so that you will be all right again. You don't mind if I do a little scratching on your hoof with my knife, do you?'

Nils Holgersson had just finished when he heard the sound of voices. He opened the stable door a little and peeped out.

His father and mother were coming down the lane. It was easy to see that they were broken by many sorrows. His mother had many lines on her face and his father's hair had turned grey. She was talking with him about getting a loan from her brother-in-law.

'No, I don't want to borrow any more money,' his father said, as they were passing the stable. 'There's nothing quite so hard as being in debt. It would be better to sell the cottage.'

'If it were not for the boy, I shouldn't mind selling,' his mother demurred. 'But what will become of him, if he returns some day, wretched and poor—as he's likely to be—and we not here?'

'You're right about that,' the father agreed. 'But we shall have to ask the people who take the place to receive him kindly and to let him know that he's welcome back to us. We shan't say a harsh word to him no matter what he may be, shall we, mother?'

'No, indeed! If I only had him again, so that I could be certain he is not starving and freezing on the highways, I'd ask nothing more!'

Then his father and mother went in, and Nils heard no more of their conversation.

He was happy and deeply moved when he knew that they loved him so dearly, although they believed he had gone astray. He longed to rush into their arms.

'But perhaps it would be an even greater sorrow were they to see me as I now am.'

While he stood there, hesitating, a cart drove up to the gate. The boy smothered a cry of surprise, for who should step from the cart and go into the house yard but Osa, the goose girl, and her father!

They walked hand in hand toward the cottage. When they were about half-way there Osa stopped her father and said:

'Now remember, father, you are not to mention the wooden shoe or the geese or the little brownie who was so like Nils Holgersson that if it was not himself it must have had some connection with him.'

'Certainly not!' said Jon Assarsson. 'I shall only say that their son has been of great help to you on several occasions—when you were trying to find me—and that therefore we have come to ask if we can't do them a service in return, since I'm a rich man now and have more than I need, thanks to the mine I discovered up in Lapland.'

'I know, father, that you can say the right thing in the right way,' Osa commended. 'It is only that one particular thing that I don't wish you to mention.'

They went into the cottage, and the boy would have liked to hear what they talked about in there; but he dared not venture near the house. It was not long before they came out again, and his father and mother accompanied them as far as the gate.

His parents were strangely happy. They appeared to have gained a new hold on life.

When the visitors were gone, father and mother lingered at the gate gazing after them.

'I don't feel unhappy any longer, since I've heard so much that is good of our Nils,' said his mother.

'It wasn't much they told us about him,' put in his father thoughtfully.

'Wasn't it enough for you that they came here specially to say they wanted to help us because our Nils had served them in many ways? I think, father, that you should have accepted their offer.'

'No mother, I don't wish to accept money from any one either as a gift or a loan. In the first place I want to free myself from all debt, then we will work our way up again. We're not so very old, are we, mother?' The father laughed heartily as he said this.

'I believe you think it will be fun to sell this place, upon which we have expended such a lot of time and hard work,' protested the mother.

'Oh, you know why I'm laughing,' the father retorted. 'It was the thought of the boy's having gone to the bad that weighed me down until I had no strength or courage left in me. Now that I know he still lives and has turned out well, you'll see that Holger Nilsson has some grit left.'

The mother went in alone, and the boy made haste to hide in a corner, for his father walked into the stable. He went over to the horse and examined its hoof, as usual, to try to discover what was wrong with it.

'What's this!' he cried, discovering some letters scratched on the hoof.

'Remove the sharp iron from the foot,' he read and glanced around inquiringly. However, he ran his fingers along the under side of the hoof and looked at it carefully.

'I believe there *is* something sharp here!' he said.

While his father was busy with the horse and the boy sat huddled in a corner, it happened that other callers came to the farm.

The fact was that when Morten Gander found himself so near his old home he simply could not resist the temptation of showing his wife and children to his old companions on the farm. So he took Dunfin and the goslings along, and made for home.



There was not a soul in the barn-yard when the gander came along. He alighted, confidently walked all around the place, and showed Dunfin how luxuriously he had lived when he was a tame goose.

When they had viewed the entire farm he noticed that the door of the cowshed was open.

‘Look in here a moment,’ he said, ‘then you will see how I lived in former days. It was very different from camping in swamps and morasses as we do now.’

The gander stood in the doorway and looked into the cowshed.

'There's not a soul in here,' he said. 'Come along, Dunfin, and you shall see the goose-pen. Don't be afraid; there's no danger.'

Forthwith the gander, Dunfin, and all six goslings waddled into the goose-pen, to have a look at the elegance and comfort in which the big white gander had lived before he joined the wild geese.

'This is the way it used to be: here was my place and over there was the trough, which was always filled with oats and water,' explained the gander.

'Wait! there's some fodder in it now.' With that he rushed to the trough and began to gobble up the oats.

But Dunfin was nervous.

'Let's go out again!' she said.

'Only two more grains,' insisted the gander. The next second he let out a shriek and ran for the door, but it was too late. The door slammed, the mistress stood without and bolted it. They were locked in.

The father had removed a sharp piece of iron from the horse's hoof and stood contentedly stroking the animal when the mother came running into the stable.

'Come, father, and see the capture I've made!'

'No, wait a minute!' said the father. 'Look here, first. I have discovered what ailed the horse.'

'I believe our luck has turned,' said the mother. 'Only fancy! the big white gander that disappeared last spring must have gone off with the wild geese. He has come back to us in company with seven wild geese. They walked straight into the goose-pen and I've shut them all in.'

'That's extraordinary,' remarked the father. 'But best of all is that we don't have to think any more that our boy stole the gander when he went away.'

'You're quite right, father,' she said. 'But I'm afraid

we'll have to kill them to-night. In two days is Morten Gooseday,¹ and we must make haste if we expect to get them to market in time.'

'I think it would be outrageous to butcher the gander now that he has returned to us with such a large family,' protested Holger Nilsson.

'If times were easier we'd let him live; but since we're going to move from here we can't keep geese. Come along now and help me carry them into the kitchen,' urged the mother.

They went out together and in a few moments the boy saw his father coming along with Morten Gander and Dunfin—one under each arm. He and his wife went into the cottage.

The gander cried:

'Tummetott, come and help me!'—as he always did when in peril—although he was not aware that the boy was at hand.

Nils heard him, yet he lingered at the door of the cowshed.

He did not hesitate because he knew that it would be well for him if the gander were beheaded—at that moment he did not even remember this—but because he shrank from being seen by his parents.

'They have a hard enough time of it already,' he thought. 'Must I bring them a new sorrow?'

But when the door closed on the gander the boy was aroused.

He dashed across the house yard, sprang up on the board walk leading to the entrance door, and ran into the hallway, where he kicked off his wooden shoes in the old accustomed way, and walked toward the door.

All the while it went so much against the grain to

¹ In Sweden 10th November is called Morten Gooseday.

appear before his father and mother that he could not raise his hand to knock.

‘But this concerns the gander’s life,’ he said to himself—‘he who has been my best friend ever since I last stood here.’

In a twinkling the boy remembered all that he and the gander had suffered on ice-bound lakes and stormy seas and among wild beasts of prey. His heart swelled with gratitude; he conquered himself and knocked on the door.

‘Is there someone who wishes to come in?’ asked his father, opening the door.

‘Mother, you shan’t touch the gander!’ cried the boy.

Instantly both the gander and Dunfin, who lay on a bench with their feet tied, gave a cry of joy, so that he was sure they were alive.

Someone else gave a cry of joy—*his mother!*

‘Goodness, but you have grown tall and handsome!’ she exclaimed.

The boy had not entered the cottage, but was standing on the doorstep like one who is not quite certain how he will be received.

‘The Lord be praised that I have you back again!’ said his mother, laughing and crying. ‘Come in, my boy! Come in!’

‘Welcome!’ added his father, and not another word could he utter.

But Nils still lingered at the threshold. He could not understand why they were so glad to see him—such as he was. Then his mother came and put her arms around him and drew him into the room, and he knew that he was all right.

‘Mother and father!’ he cried. ‘I’m a big boy. I’m a human being again!’

PART TWENTY-TWO

THE PARTING WITH THE WILD GEESE

NILS AROSE before dawn the next morning and wandered down to the coast. He was standing alone on the strand east of Smyge fishing hamlet before sunrise. He was quite alone. He had been in the pen with Morten Gander to try to rouse him, but the big white gander had no desire to leave home. He did not say a word but only stuck his bill under his wing and went to sleep again.

To all appearances the weather promised to be almost as perfect as it had been that spring day when the wild geese came to Skåne. There was hardly a ripple on the water; the air was still and the boy thought of the good passage the geese would have. He himself was as yet in a kind of daze—sometimes thinking he was an elf, sometimes a human being. When he saw a stone wall alongside the road he was afraid to go farther until he had made sure that no wild animal lurked behind it. Very soon he laughed to himself and rejoiced because he was big and strong and did not have to be afraid of anything.

When he reached the coast he stationed himself, big as he was, at the very edge of the strand, so that the wild geese could see him.

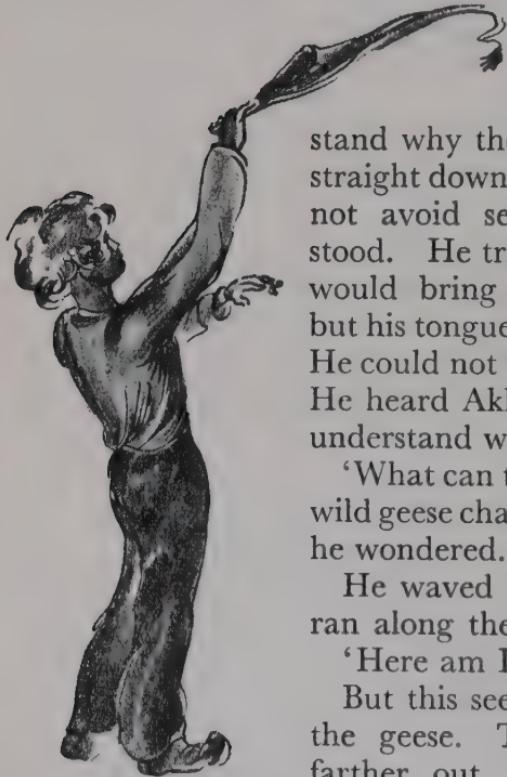
It was a busy day for the birds of passage. Bird calls sounded on the air continuously. The boy smiled as he thought that no one but himself understood what the

birds were saying to one another. Presently wild geese came flying; one big flock following another.

'I hope it's not my geese that are going away without bidding me farewell,' he thought. He wanted so much to tell them how everything had turned out, and to show them that he was no longer an elf but a human being.

Then there came a flock that flew faster and cackled louder than the others, and something told him that this must be *the* flock, but now he was not quite so sure about it as he would have been the day before.

The flock slowed its flight and circled up and down along the coast.



Nils knew it was the right one, but he could not under-

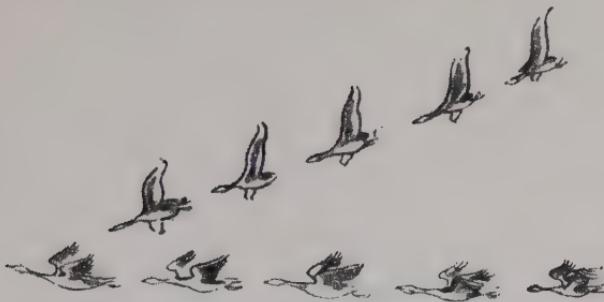
stand why the geese did not come straight down to him. They could not avoid seeing him where he stood. He tried to give a call that would bring them down to him, but his tongue would not obey him. He could not make the right sound. He heard Akka's calls, but did not understand what she said.

'What can this mean? Have the wild geese changed their language?' he wondered.

He waved his cap to them and ran along the shore, calling:

'Here am I, where are you?'

But this seemed only to frighten the geese. They rose and flew farther out to sea. At last he



understood. They did not know that he was human, had not recognized him. He could not call them to him because human beings cannot speak the language of birds. He could not speak their language nor could he understand it.

Although Nils was very glad to be released from the enchantment, still he thought it hard that because of this he should be parted from his old friends.

He sat down on the sands and buried his face in his hands. What was the use of his gazing after them any more?

Presently he heard the rustle of wings. Old mother Akka had found it hard to fly away from Tummetott, and turned back, and now that the boy sat quite still she ventured to fly nearer to him. Suddenly something must have told her who he was, for she alighted close beside him.

Nils gave a cry of joy and took old Akka in his arms. The other wild geese crowded round him and stroked him with their bills. They cackled and chattered and wished him all kinds of good luck, and he too talked to them and thanked them for the wonderful journey which he had been privileged to make in their company.

All at once the wild geese became strangely quiet and withdrew from him, as if to say:

‘Alas! he is a man. He does not understand us: we do not understand him!’

Then the boy rose and went over to Akka; he stroked her and patted her. He did the same to Yksi and Kaksi, Kolme and Neljä, Viisi and Kuusi—the old birds who had been his companions from the very start.

After that he walked farther up the strand. He knew perfectly well that the sorrows of the birds do not last long, and he wanted to part with them while they were still sad at losing him.

As he crossed the shore meadows he turned and watched the many flocks that were flying over the sea. All were shrieking their coaxing calls—only one goose flock flew silently on as long as he could follow it with his eyes. The wedge was perfect, the speed good, and the wing strokes strong and certain.

Nils felt such a yearning for his departing comrades that he almost wished he were Tummetott again and could travel over land and sea with a flock of wild geese.

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